HOW GOD INSPIRED THE BIBLE

J. PATERSON SMYTH

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How God Inspired the Bible

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How God Inspired the Bible

THOUGHTS FOR THE PRESENT DISQUIET

BY

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PREFACE TO SIXTH EDITION

ONLY last week a young student brought me a sceptical book, a rather ignorant but clever, veiled assault on the Bible. Most of its force came from the popular ignorance to which such teaching is addressed. If even these two facts were clearly understood that there is a human as well as a divine side in God's revelation and that God's teaching of the world was progressive as our teaching of a child, even that much would save many a difficulty.

I wrote these chapters years ago to meet such perplexities. I send out this sixth edition, now carefully revised with the earnest hope that it may still be some little help.

J. P. S.

MONTREAL, NOVEMBER, 1918.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

THESE "thoughts for the present disquiet" are intended especially for those who are disquieted. There are many good men to whom the notions, learned half unconsciously at a Christian mother's knee, are very dear and sufficiently true for the guidance of life—many to whom newer views would be but a source of disturbance. It is perhaps not needful for them to inquire any farther. Let them rest in peace, feeding on God's green pastures besides His still waters.

But let them remember that it is not given to all men thus to rest, and that restlessness, as well as rest, may be a gift of God, His path to a higher knowledge of truth. If they feel pained at the presenting here of doubts and difficulties unfamiliar to themselves, let me assure them that there is a very large public indeed to whom such are only too familiar, and who for want of plain speaking about

them, are often perilously near to making shipwreck of their faith.

It is quite true that in trying to help these there is a danger of suggesting difficulties to others who have never thought of them before. But this is a danger inseparable from any attempt of this kind, and I have no hesitation in incurring the responsibility of it. These are not the days for Christian teachers to hold their peace and risk the faith of one-half of their people by humouring the mistaken views of the other half, through fear of disquieting them. There is nothing to be known about the Bible that need disquiet sensible people, and even if there were, "it is never safe," as Martin Luther said long ago, "to do anything against the truth."

J. PATERSON SMYTH.

St. George's Rectory, Montreal,
May, 1910.

Book 1

The Present Disquiet and its Remedy

CHAPTER I

DISQUIET

The "Problem of the Day"

I TOOK this title from an important series of articles which was running through the *Record* in England. A similar series or number of separate articles and letters is appearing in almost every one of the religious papers this year, while even the secular daily press is not very far behind, as witness the references in the chief English newspapers, and especially the important correspondence appearing in the *Times* during the past three months. What is this "Problem of the Day" that is drawing to itself such notice not only in the so-called "religious world," but in an increasingly large circle without it as well? It is that of the true position of the Bible. Many men are everywhere asking, though perhaps not always asking aloud, What of the claims of the Bible? What of its inspiration? How far is it human in its origin? How far is it Divine? How far is it infallible? Is it

merely the word of "holy men of old," or is its every utterance literally "the Word of God"?

Never was there more interest, more inquiry, and, I fear I must add, more disquiet amongst thoughtful people with regard to these questions. Men are no longer satisfied with the old answers to them. It is foolishness to talk of the danger and unwisdom of publicly discussing them now. Even if it were right to ignore them, they cannot be ignored. They are no longer questions confined to critics and theologians, or discussed only in abstruse, inaccessible books. Our popular magazines and religious newspapers continually refer to them. The public are freely taken into the confidence of scholars, and taught all, and often more than all, that these scholars know themselves.

At all times such questions have occupied men's minds when they thought about certain problems presented by the Bible. But they have in the main been shirked and put aside as too difficult or too irreverent. That can never be again. There is a freedom and fearlessness about these questions to-day which demands that they shall be answered one way or another. There has come to us a crisis in the history of the Bible, a crisis through which our generation must pass—amid strife and heart-burnings, it may be—amid doubts and fears for the

future of religion—but whose results will ultimately be the enthroning of the Bible in a position firmer and more lasting than it has ever held before in the hearts of Christian people.

All such crises are from the hand of God, part of His method of guiding the world's progress. The history of religious thought is but a record of such crises. Whenever a truth has in course of time become encrusted with error, it is by thus shaking and disturbing men's beliefs that the evil is to be remedied. "Yet once more" God is thus shaking the popular notions about the Bible: "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, . . . *that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*"[1]

Let us watch this process now that is going on around us. Let us note the various groups that are, some of them unconsciously, working out for the Bible the good purposes of God.

I

The Disquieted Thinker

Let us first regard the large and rapidly growing[2] class for which primarily this book is being written

[1] Heb. xii. 27.

[2] A writer in the *Times* of January 7th describes them as "this great third party of enormous numbers, and rolling on like a snow-

—the thoughtful religious man who is disquieted about his Bible because he has had to break with the traditional view of it, and has not yet been able to find any other. Let us believe, as we are bound to do in the case of every honest thinker, that his rising disquiet and dissatisfaction are but the means through which the God of truth is helping him to higher truth. Let us notice how his attitude toward the Bible is affected by the different phases of thought with which he comes in contact.

"I do not reject or disbelieve the Bible," he says. "Far from it. But my mind is disturbed about it. My faith in it is shaken. I read some expressions of its inspired men that seem to me far below the standard of Christ. I hear of discrepancies in its history, of contradictions to established decisions of science, of crudeness and imperfection in its early moral teaching, of compiling and editing and revising and re-revising in books that I almost looked on as direct from the finger of God. I still try to cling to it for comfort and help. I feel that, even if these charges be true, it would still remain the most marvellous book in the world. But I am perplexed and disquieted. I hardly know what to believe about it. I have lost that perfect

ball;" and another of the 14th says, "I belong to that vast party. I was brought up in the traditional beliefs about the Bible, and I have suffered the exquisite pain of finding my Bible slipping from me."

unquestioning confidence which used to be such a comfort in turning to its pages.

II

The Secularist

"And recently my difficulties have grown sharper and more defined. I know something of the secularist propaganda throughout England. I meet with men who are secularists and infidels, some of them with rancorous bitterness against all religion; but some of them, too, with sad and honest hearts, who seem fearlessly seeking the truth alone. And I notice that their chief difficulties are connected with the Bible. If ever I glance at the weekly accounts of secularist lectures in the large towns of England, if I meet with the common literature of the infidel press, everywhere I find that the Bible forms the chief object of attack. The gibe and the sneer, and sometimes, I must confess, the earnest, powerful argument, are directed against difficulties which seem presented by the Bible. Some of these difficulties are such as have long ago spontaneously presented themselves to my own mind, and I have tried to forget them or leave them unread. I have thought it best to 'let sleeping dogs lie.' But they will not lie any longer now. These

Bible assailants have roused them with a vengeance. The laugh is raised at the 'Christian superstition which believes in the stupendous miracle of the stopping of the universe that Joshua might complete his victory over the Canaanites.' With mocking emphasis are read the 'words of the loving God,' 'O daughter of Babylon, happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones!'

"I feel myself cringe as I hear such expressions launched with vigour and earnestness into an audience of working-men who have been taught to regard the Bible just as I have been taught, and as the lecturer himself was taught in his childhood. And I cannot see, at least from their point of view and mine, how such difficulties are to be answered.

III

The Biblical Scholar

"But another influence, and from a very different quarter, has still more affected my beliefs. I find things subversive of many of my notions about the Bible put forward by men who are no sceptics or scoffers or enemies of religion, but who seem to have reverently and for many years investigated the phenomena of the Bible. They are professors in the universities, bishops and dignitaries in the

Church, men of distinguished scholarship, of undoubted piety, of widely differing schools of religious opinion. I gather that they cannot regard the Bible as they did in their childhood, and as it is popularly regarded by thousands of holy men and women to-day. They find more of the human in it, they say, though not, when rightly understood, less of the Divine. They think it has more in common with other books than is generally believed, especially in the writings of the Old Testament. They think it quite possible for the ancient authors to have made crude and incorrect statements in science and history. They point out the lower morality of the Old Testament as compared with the New. They find traces of a much freer literary treatment of the books than is consistent, certainly with my notions of inspiration.

"In the face of all this I feel it almost impossible to hold the notions about the Bible which I have been taught; and yet to give up these seems to me to give up the Divine authority of Scripture altogether."

IV

The Orthodox Controversialist

Let us trace a little further this doubter's experience, and see what help in his disquiet he receives

from his religious friends. This is usually what we shall find. Some of them are modest, simple Christians who live much in communion with God, who regard the Bible as the sacred source of their comfort and strength, and shrink sensitively from the free and often flippant criticism to which now-a-days it is so frequently subjected. They regard their friend's disquiet as a temptation of Satan; one that has attempted an entrance into their own hearts at times and troubled them sorely. It is a trial of his faith, they say; he must resolutely turn away his thoughts from such subjects; he must earnestly fight those doubts upon his knees. And though they cannot satisfy him, yet somehow their simple faith brings him comfort and hope. He sees that they are not very logical, but he sees, too, that the Bible has been a great power in their lives; that they are away up on the heights with God in a region where difficulties such as his have scarce power to disquiet; and almost unconsciously to himself his faith is strengthened and helped by theirs.

Others of them are—let me draw from the life, from one of the best specimens I know of those who hold the traditional views of inspiration—thoughtful, clear-minded, godly men, who can read and interest themselves in the main questions about the Bible, but without any perceptible doubt or uneasi-

ness to themselves, partly on account of their placid disposition, partly through their finding so much of the holy and beautiful in Scripture that they never trouble themselves about difficulties at all; partly, too, because through that delightful inconsistency by which so many a man escapes the conclusions of his premises, they can loosely hold the popular views of inspiration and yet pleasantly slip out of the difficulties when they come. But such as these cannot help my disquieted thinker.

Lastly come those satisfied, self-confident men who are quite sure of everything, who never think of holding their judgment in suspense. Some of my readers will recognise the class—men who have never troubled themselves much with real thinking, who have never doubted and never investigated, who consider religion itself bound up with their notions of inspiration, and thus fearfully peril all faith in the Bible. Inspiration, in its Divine largeness and freedom and grandeur, is an idea quite beyond them. Their notion is of a sort of rigid superintendence to guarantee that each little detail of the Bible history shall be absolutely correct; that its science shall be unassailable in the light of the nineteenth century; that its moral teaching in every period shall be perfect. To attempt to question this is, in their opinion, to endanger the

whole foundations of religion. Such men as these are the chief cause of disquiet, and the chief cause of the discredit of the Bible. They pledge God's inspiration, they pledge Christianity itself, to the truth of their own mechanical theories. They give to the infidel his chief victories over religion. They make sad the seeking souls whom God has not made sad; they unconsciously make void the Word of God by their traditions, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Such are the classes of helpers which an inquirer most frequently meets amongst his associates in the religious world. Seldom does he discuss these difficulties with his clergy. Seldom does he happen on friends who have themselves fought their way through difficulties such as his and reached the firmer ground where they are safe at rest.

Therefore the disquiet goes on increasing, none the less for being generally subdued and unexpressed. To some it soon ceases to give much concern; to others it is positive torture to the end. Who that knows anything of it can speak lightly of the pain and struggle through which many an earnest man has won his way to the light at least? The writer can look back on his own early difficulties; he has known something since of the difficulties of others. There are still ringing in his ears the recent

words of a young student from one of our universities, fast losing hold of his faith in the Bible. "There are hundreds," he said, "of young fellows like me who do not want to lose their grasp of the Bible, but we can no longer view it as we have been taught to do. If there is any way by which we can still hold it and treasure it, do our teachers know it; and if they do, why do they not tell us?"

V

Why is this Disquiet especially in our Day?

Why has all this questioning about the Bible come especially to us? Partly because of the rapid spread of rationalistic speculation, but chiefly because in our age, more than in any age before, the God of truth is giving to men new revelations of His truth, in history and science and comparative religion, and in the careful study and criticism of the Bible. Such revelations, though they cannot clash with the truth of Scripture rightly understood, yet most certainly can and do clash with many very stubborn notions about it, notions which have grown in the popular belief to be regarded as part of the Scripture itself. The fact is, that for some centuries past men have been forcing the

Bible into a false position, a position perilous to its authority, unwarranted by its own statements, and, worst of all, in a great measure obscuring the real power and beauty of its teaching. In the fierce light of modern inquiry it is becoming more and more evident that this position cannot be maintained, and simple men are growing disquieted, thinking the Bible itself to be in danger, while those who know better are looking forward hopefully, even though in some measure anxiously too. They know that deep rooted mistakes and misconceptions cannot be removed without pain and perhaps loss, but they know, too, that if the Bible is to be free to accomplish its work in the world, it must at any cost be rescued from its present false position.

May not this rescue be in a certain degree furthered by the present disquiet? May not the overthrow of some of our cherished beliefs be but a necessary preparation for further teachings? May not scholar and infidel and doubter and believer be working out for the Bible the good purposes of God in widening and clearing our notions of His truth?—

"For I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

CHAPTER II

REASSURANCE

I

Is the Bible Safe?

I DO not believe in any effectual remedy for doubt and disquiet save through making a man face boldly the difficulties that disquiet him. He must make up his mind that truth only is to be the object of his search; that he will accept no ignoble peace from resting on a foundation that he is afraid thoroughly to test.[1] A man with *real* faith in the God of Truth would not hesitate to investigate to the uttermost the worst of his difficulties even if it meant the risk of losing his Bible altogether.

But we are not all formed in that heroic mould, and though in God's wise discipline it may be often good for one to enter into these inquiries

[1] "I find in the Bible the secret of all truth. All I truly know I derive from it; and yet I would say to every man, 'Do not believe the Bible if you cannot see that it is true. Deal freely, boldly by it. It is a friend and not an enemy. If you don't treat it straightforwardly it cannot do its service to you.' "—*Jas. Hinton, Life*, p. 214.

about the Scriptures with disquieted heart, and half afraid lest the result may be the shipwreck of his belief, yet I see no cause why one need do so unnecessarily. And therefore I should like to pause here at the outset to encourage my disquieted thinker by reminding him how little cause there is for real apprehension as to the overthrow of his belief in inspiration itself.

Not that I intend to enter in any detail into proofs of the fact of inspiration. Such an attempt would both make my book too large and also distract attention from the main purpose I have in view. This book is not written for unbelievers, who deny the fact of inspiration, but for Christians who, believing in the Bible as a book inspired of God, are puzzled and perplexed when they meet with facts that seem inconsistent with it. My object is to help such as these. My title assumes their belief that the Bible is inspired.

But experience has shown me how easily the question, How God inspired the Bible, may pass into the further question, Did God inspire the Bible at all? Is it not continually taking place in the present disquiet? And therefore it seems advisable at the outset of our inquiry to remind men of facts which have been the stronghold of others in these passing disquiets, to try to show

them that all for which we really value the Bible is safe from assault, and far above the reach of these controversies of to-day.

II

"A Great Cloud of Witnesses"

If the fear should ever come to you, my reader, of the possibility of the Scriptures being discredited by present-day controversies after having been accepted as God-given for three thousand years, first pause for a moment and let the full weight of the thought press on you of all that is implied in the fact that any set of old documents, always open to scrutiny and question, should for thousands of years have been accepted as of Divine origin, and that they should have been yielded to by men as an authority to guide their conduct and impose on them commands often disagreeable to themselves; that this acceptance and obedience should have been chiefly amongst the most thoughtful and highly-cultured nations of the world; that it should have gone on, age after age, steadily increasing, and never in any age made such marvellous progress as in this cultured, enlightened, all-questioning nineteenth century.

What gave these Scriptures such authority?

Remember they were only odd separate documents, often with hundreds of years intervening between them, written by different writers of different characters to different people, and under different circumstances. Remember that in many cases we do not know their origin, or how they assumed their present form. And yet somehow we never can reach back into history to a time when they were not treasured and reverenced among men as in some way at least above human productions. There they stand, a long chain of records with one end reaching away into the far back past, and the other gathering around the feet of Christ.

And remember especially this, that they were selected out by no miracle, that they rest on no formal decision of external authority, on no sentence of Church or Council, or pope or saint, nay, not even of the Blessed Lord Himself; for long before He came, for centuries and centuries there they stood, testifying of Him, cherished and reverenced as a message that had come from above "at sundry times and in divers manners." All study of their history shows that their acceptance rested on no decision of any external authority. They were accepted as of Divine origin for many generations before they were gathered into any fixed collection. "The Church," said Luther, "can-

not give more force or authority to a book than it has in itself. A Council cannot make that to be Scripture which in its own nature is not Scripture."

People say that the Great Synagogue, or their official descendants, collected the Old Testament Canon of Scripture. Yes, but when? Somewhere about the time of our Lord,[1] when the books had been for ages recognised as of God. People say that the Christian Church collected the New Testament writings into a Bible. Yes, but when? After they had been for 300 years accepted as the God-given guide of the Church. It was not their being collected into a Bible that made them of authority, but rather the fact of their possessing authority made them be collected into a Bible.

Again, we repeat the question, What gave them that authority? And there seems no possible answer but this, that they possessed it of themselves. They commanded the position they held by their own power. Men's moral sense and reason combined to establish them. They appealed by their own intrinsic worth to the God-given moral faculty, and the response to that appeal through all

[1] In the main the Old Testament Canon was settled long before this time. But some few books, as Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles, were questioned up to the first Christian century.

the ages since is in reality the main foundation of the Bible's position.

Look at the Old Testament If we at the present day are asked why we receive it as inspired, we usually reply that we receive it on the authority of our Lord and His apostles. They accepted it as the Word of God, and handed it on to us with their imprimatur upon it. Well, but why was it accepted before their day without any such formal sanction? How did men come to believe and obey as Divinely inspired the words of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, and the rest? Excepting the case of Moses, there were no miracles or portents; no external voice from heaven to command men's allegiance. They were not established on their Divine supremacy by any single authority. Why then were their utterances accepted?

It seems evident there can be but one answer. "They asserted that supremacy by their own intrinsic claims. Men were compelled to acknowledge that their declaration that 'the Word of the Lord had come to them' was true. There was that in the messages of the prophets and in the evidence by which they were accompanied, which compelled this belief. It was often disputed, and as a rule it was vehemently disputed, when the prophets appeared. . . . But, nevertheless, the voice of the

prophet, the message which he brought from the Lord, was recognised by the faithful few in his own time, and gradually, but surely, compelled allegiance among his people.

"In this history of the Hebrew Scriptures you have the clearest and most unquestionable evidence of the ground on which the authority of the Scripture stands. There was no external authority to appeal to. The evidence of miracles was not always present, and even when present, it was not by itself decisive of the question. The prophets delivered their message as the Word of the Lord, and could appeal to no higher authority in authentication of it. But that word *compelled recognition* sooner or later; and the longer the Jewish nation lasted, and the more time there was for these sacred books to produce their natural impression on the minds of the people, the more thoroughly and the more unhesitatingly were they recognised as of Divine origin and authority. . . . God's Word had vindicated itself. It had been disputed by hard hearts and obstinate minds; but it had held its own and made its way; it had fulfilled the assurance of the prophet, that 'My word shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.' In point of fact, men heard a voice, and had to

decide from whom it came. Were those awful, penetrating utterances of men like Jeremiah merely the utterances of a man wiser or better than his fellows? Or were they, as the prophets said, the voice of that God who searches our hearts, who is about our path and about our bed, and spies out all our ways? The voice had to be assigned to its author; and the more men listened the less could they doubt that the voice was that of God. When once this was recognised, every solemn utterance of a prophet who had been intrusted with such a message could not but be regarded as precious, and treated with the most reverent care; and thus there grew up that collection of sacred Scriptures which were received in the time of our Lord as embodying His revelation to His people. . . .

"The books of the New Testament became recognised among Christians just as the books of the Old Testament had been recognised among the Jews, by virtue of their own inherent evidence. Certain witnesses came forward and recorded in writing the teaching of our Lord, or announced certain messages for which they had His authority, or the guidance of His Spirit in communicating them to their fellows. Men had to decide for themselves whether they believed those claims. The Apostles were supported, indeed, in many cases by miracles,

but not always; and though those miracles afforded momentous evidence, they were not recognised in themselves, and standing alone, as decisive of the whole question. No apparent miracle, it was felt, could of itself authenticate a message from God which did not bear internal evidence also of having proceeded from Him. The appeal, in short, in the early Church was directed, as in the time of our Lord Himself, to the hearts and consciences of men. He Himself could but appeal to those hearts and consciences, and men accepted or rejected Him, not by reference to any external authority, but in proportion to their capacity for recognising His Divine character.

"Thus from first to last, the authority of the Scriptures has been equivalent to the authority with which they themselves convinced men that they came from God."[1]

Now, is not this fact a striking evidence of the inspiration of these books? To be sure, we believe that all this was the work of God. The Bible was not merely chosen by the Church. "The Bible was formed, even as the Church itself was formed, by the action of that Holy Spirit which was the life of both." It was His divine working that separated

[1] A Sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, on Sunday, January 31, 1892, by Rev. Principal Wace, D.D. The italics are mine.

certain books for the perpetual instruction of the Church. But we must emphasise the fact that the mode of His working was by the quickening and guiding of human souls that they should choose and reverence and love and use that which was most helpful and stimulating to their religious life, that by a divine instinct men should at length gradually, unconsciously arrive at the general recognition of a certain set of writings as authoritative Scripture. Thus the Bible, as it were, formed itself by virtue of a divine power inherent in it. It won its own way; it built its own throne. All that was good in human consciousness recognised its right to rule over men.

This is what I want especially to emphasise, that the Bible has evidenced its divine power and won its authoritative position by its appeal to the judgment and the conscience of many generations. Mainly by this appeal it holds its position to-day. I have been anxious to show you that the position of the Bible rests not on any miracle, on any external authority of Church or Council, but on its appeal to the minds and consciences of men. You may doubt a miracle, you may doubt your individual instincts, you may doubt the competency of any one body of men. You cannot so easily doubt the conviction of a hundred generations. They found

in it their light and hope and peace. They found in it a power to make them good, and they were convinced that it had come from God.[1]

The Bible, therefore, rests on no foundation that can be overthrown by man. Its authority to-day rests on the free response to the the appeal which it makes to the minds and hearts and consciences of this generation, strengthened incalculably by the results of that same appeal to the minds and hearts and consciences of every preceding generation. Through all the ages there comes to us the enormous aggregate of ever-accumulating attestation to the Book from the best and holiest people, the people, therefore, most competent to judge of the value of a book of religion.

[1] I am quite conscious that I may be pointed to the acceptance of the Koran and the Sacred Books of India as a fact that weakens this argument. I have no hesitation in admitting that, in part, the reason of their acceptance, too, lies in their appeal to the consciences of men through their containing broken rays of "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world." I should be sorry to think that Christianity required my belief that the God and Father of all men left the whole non-Christian world without any light from Himself. But surely there is a vast difference between the position of these books and that of the Bible. All that is good in the Koran existed already in Christianity and Judaism, and is mainly derived from them, and besides, it had also the authority of Mahomet, an authority frequently enforced by the sword. The Sacred Books of India, with their pearls of spiritual truth gleaming here and there amongst a mass of rubbish, can surely not be compared with the Bible in reference to the above argument. Their acceptance amongst a lower and more ignorant race, few of whom have any real knowledge of their contents, is a very different matter from the acceptance of the Bible amongst the higher races of the world, amongst people who have it open to their constant scrutiny, and to whom its acceptance or rejection is felt to involve issues of vital moment.

Pause now for a moment to take in the full import of this fact, to feel the force of the confirmation that it gives to the witness in your own conscience. Consider then that the power of the Book to-day is greater than ever before. Consider also that whatever cause of intellectual or moral difficulties men may find in it to-day has always been in it and open to the constant scrutiny of all. Consider that it has held its authoritative position in the face of the most violent attacks all through the centuries; that infidels have overthrown and exploded it times without number, with the result only that its power has steadily increased, so that to-day it would be almost as easy to root the sun out of the heavens as to root this Bible out of human life.

Take this single fact as an illustration. A hundred years ago Voltaire refuted it quite satisfactorily, as it seemed to himself. "In a century," he said, "the Bible and Christianity will be things of the past." Well, how has his prophecy been fulfilled? Before his day the whole world from the beginning of it had not produced six millions of Bibles. In the single century since, and that too this enlightened critical nineteenth century of ours, *two hundred millions* of Bibles and portions of Scripture have issued from the press, and there are

to-day about eighty Bible Societies distributing them through the world in nearly every known language of mankind!

Marvellous, indeed, if this Book be not Divine! Let the infidel explain these facts if he can. Let the disquieted Christian steady himself by the thought of them, and remember that THESE FACTS REMAIN UNDISTURBED HOWEVER MEN'S NOTIONS MAY CHANGE ABOUT THE BIBLE.

III

The Witness of the Book Itself

Now turn we to examine this Book itself, and try to judge why, in all ages, it has so authoritatively appealed to men. Of the *external* evidence which impressed the early Church we are not now in all cases competent to judge. We have to accept their testimony for that. The *internal* evidence, the appeal to the heart and conscience, "any man that willeth to do God's will" is still able to appreciate. Let us glance briefly over the book. Let us try to judge it honestly. Let us not ignore what seem to us faults and defects, though they may not have seemed so in earlier days. Let us seek fairly its main characteristics.

We find at once this very striking fact, that in

the midst of the world, and its cares, and its affairs, this Book itself is not of the world worldly. It deals with the higher world of the soul. It is constantly teaching men more or less clearly of God, and duty, and righteousness of life. We meet in it with thoughts that are altogether beyond the ken of this world—thoughts of God's love, of God's fatherhood, of God's forgiveness, of the duty of yielding up this life to be lived for Him. Could such thoughts have come from unaided humanity?

1. We find in it a Jewish national history. Never surely was national history so extraordinarily written. Everything is looked at in relation to God. Records of other ancient nations tell of what this or that great king accomplished; how the people conquered or were conquered by their enemies. In the Jewish records everything is of God. It was God who conquered, God who delivered, God who punished, God who taught. There is no boasting of the national glory, no flattering of the national vanity; their greatest sins and disgraces and punishments are recorded just as fully as their triumphs and their joys.

In the records of other nations the chief stress is laid on power, and prosperity, and comfort, and wealth. In these strange records *goodness* seems

the only thing of importance. To do the right seems of infinitely more value than to be powerful, or rich, or successful in life. Strange indeed if such history-writing be entirely of the earth! Pity that we have not learned such history-writing ourselves!

2. We hear continually, as it were, a mysterious Voice all through the history threatening, encouraging, pleading with an unwilling people. The sole business of prophet, and historian, and legislator seems to be to rebuke men for sin, to incite them to holiness, to point them to the sometimes but dimly seen ideal of a noble, beautiful life. A rare phenomenon, indeed, in the histories of nations!

Will some one say that this was the natural development of the moral tendencies of the Jewish race? Was it, though? Of that race whose most prominent tendencies, by their own confession, were idolatry and impurity? Remember how unwillingly they received that teaching, how rarely they obeyed it, how they killed the prophets that declared it to them, how they were the "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears that did always resist the Holy Ghost." Nay, surely not from the natural consciousness of Israel could such a Voice have come.

3. Look next at the national poems and hymns of the people, the greatest miracle, it seems to me, in the whole of the world's history—the miracle that old John Bright felt entirely sufficient of itself to prove the inspiration of the Bible. I cannot conceive any honest, earnest unbeliever studying these carefully and believing them to be but ordinary human productions.

When I turn to the secular history of the world at the time when the Psalms were written, even at the lowest date that criticism may assume; when I read of its filthiness and depravity, of its worship of images and fetishes, of its degraded conception of God and duty; and when I place that history beside my Bible open at the Book of Psalms, it seems to me that the veriest infidel should be overwhelmed by the contrast.

"Have mercy on me, O God, after Thy great goodness; according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness; and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying, and clear when Thou art judged. . . . Turn Thy face from my sins, and put out all my misdeeds. Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. . . . The sacrifice of God is a troubled

spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise. . . .

"Praise the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all thine infirmities: who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness. . . . The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, and of great goodness. He will not always be chiding; neither keepeth He His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins: nor rewarded us according to our wickedness. For look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth: so great is His mercy also toward them that fear Him. Look how wide the east is from the west: so far hath He set our sins from us. Yea, like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him. For He knoweth whereof we are made: He remembereth that we are but dust. . . .

"The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. He shall convert my soul, and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me. Thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

I am not ignoring the imprecatory psalms or any such defects. I shall deal with them later on. They are no more than the spots in the sun in this magnificent collection. Think that such poems

were written in the days when Rome was founded, and ask your own heart if they came from unaided humanity.

4. And here is another extraordinary fact. We find as we examine this Book a series of teachers, who could not have been mere fanatics because of their calm common-sense, who could not have been impostors because of the nobleness of their teaching and the danger that it exposed them to, yet claiming authoritatively to speak for Jehovah. They seem to have felt a mysterious Spirit striving with their spirit, teaching, enlightening, sometimes almost compelling them to speak. Go through the whole of the prophetic writings and feel the impressiveness of that constant iteration, "The Word of the Lord," "Thus saith the Lord." See at times the half-reluctant prophet groaning under the weight of "the burden of the Lord," and forced sometimes almost against his will to speak the pleadings and threatenings of God to the people —ay, and doing so often at the risk of his life; and when you have done this, ask yourself again, Are these the phenomena of ordinary human history?

5. Another peculiarity of the Book. It predicts

the future and its predictions are fulfilled. What unaided sage or statesman can do that? "Who as I," saith God, "declareth the thing that shall be?"

How shall I select instances where instances are so many? Hear the prophet's stern rebuke to Hezekiah 150 years before the captivity.[1] "The word of the Lord of Hosts, Behold, the days come that all . . . shall be carried to Babylon, nothing shall be left. And thy sons shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon." Hear Micah[2] predict the same captivity, and also the deliverance that should afterwards come. Read the announcements that Babylon should be a desert waste and Nineveh an utter desolation, that Tyre should be a rock for the spreading of nets, that Israel should be scattered among the nations, and Jerusalem trodden down of the Gentiles. Were these things but the guesses of astute historians, or is the simple Bible testimony true that "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"?

But these mere national prophecies are unimportant matters to dwell on. Turn to those that called forth the long expectation of the Messiah. Every careful student can see that there runs like

[1] Isaiah xxxix. 5. [2] Micah ii. 10.

a golden thread through the whole Old Testament prophecy the ever deepening conviction that God had some great purpose yet in store for His Church, something far above Israel's life of petty victories, and defeats, and captivity, and restoration, and for which these little events were only a preparation. More or less vaguely there seems always the belief that, somehow, somewhen, there would be a fuller deliverance, a closer and more real union with God, a manifestation of God in present nearness. Here and there we find it rising into more definite prediction; the prophecy of a seed that should bruise the serpent's head, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; of a prophet like unto Moses whom God should raise up; of a Child born, a Son given, whose name should be the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of a righteous Servant on whom the Lord should lay the iniquity of us all; of Messiah the Prince cut off but not for Himself, and of one like a Son of Man to whom is given an everlasting kingdom, a dominion that shall not pass away; of the glory of the second Temple that should surpass the glory of the first, and many other prophecies of a similar kind. And surely it is a striking fact, considering the jealously exclusive temper of the Jews, that these far-off visions of Messiah presented

Him as the Saviour of the Gentiles also. "Is it a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel? I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

Let men explain these as they will, it is a confessedly historical fact that amongst the Jews themselves there arose from these prophetic anticipations a more or less definite hope of a kingdom and a Messiah who should be in some sense Divine. Let us candidly ask if such things can be explained away. Let critics argue as they please about the dates of the books; they were, at any rate, very long prior to Christ. Whence came these predictions if not from above? Would any one venture to call them astute guesses about the future? No reasonable man, I think. Certainly no Christian man who knows how continually the Lord Himself appealed to the old prophecies, to the necessity that all things "must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him."

6. Last, but not least, notice the marvellous unity of spirit through the whole Book. How comes it that these diverse compilations, often with

centuries between them, should combine to form one harmonious whole if no great Master were directing the work? This in itself ought to show their inspiration. "If it appears," says Dr. Westcott,[1] "that a large collection of fragmentary records, written, with few exceptions, without any designed connection, at most distant times and under the most varied circumstances, yet combines to form a definite whole, broadly separated from other books; if it further appear that these different parts, when interpreted historically, reveal a gradual progress of social spiritual life, uniform at least in its general direction; if, without any intentional purpose, they offer not only remarkable coincidences in minute details of facts, but also subtle harmonies of complementary doctrine; if, in proportion as they are felt to be separate, they are felt also to be instinct with a common spirit—then it will be readily acknowledged that, however they came into being first, however they were united afterwards into the Sacred Volume, they are legibly stamped with the Divine seal as 'inspired by God' in a sense in which no other writings are."

We close here our brief examination of the Book itself. Passing over altogether the external attestation, we have tried to find the internal power

[1] *Bible in the Church*, p. 15.

in the Scriptures by which they ruled men's lives for 3000 years. With one exception, we have glanced only at the lower revelation in the Old Testament, because it is the Old Testament chiefly that men are questioning to-day, and also because whatever is true of its moral and spiritual greatness is admittedly true in a far higher degree of the New Testament writings. Even in this lower revelation, in spite of what may seem to us its defects and imperfections, we find more than enough to explain its appeal to the minds and consciences of men.

If we keep in mind that in the New Testament this appeal is tenfold intensified—that even to this day no nation, no single individual, has ever attained to the exquisite ideal that it placed before the world in the dark days of 2000 years ago—our testing of the Bible need proceed no further. We shall find unhesitatingly in the intrinsic virtue of the Book the reason of its marvellous vitality and power, the mark that it has come to us from God Himself. LET US REMEMBER THAT THESE FACTS REMAIN UNDISTURBED, HOWEVER MEN'S NOTIONS MAY CHANGE ABOUT THE BIBLE.

IV

The Witness of Christ

The facts already considered appeal almost as much to the infidel as to the Christian. Here I appeal to Christians only, and point them to the chief, the unassailable ground for every Christian man of his belief in the Divine origin of the Bible. It is this. *That it all centres in Jesus Christ Himself.* It cannot be dissociated from Him. It is closely, inseparably bound up with His life.

The Incarnation does not appear as a separate solitary event unconnected with the history before and after. It appears as the climax in a long historical manifestation of God to man recorded in the Old Testament, and as the head and source of a following and fuller manifestation recorded in the New. The Old Testament tells of the preparation for Christ. The New Testament tells that when that preparation was complete "in the fulness of time God sent forth His Son." Jesus Christ, as it were, stands between them and lays His hand upon them both. The Old Testament is the Scriptures which He told men were of God and which bare witness of Him. The New Testament is the story of His words and works, and the teaching of apostles and early disciples sent forth by Him as

teachers with the power of the Holy Ghost. It is this fact that Christ is its centre which accounts for the striking unity of this collection of separate documents. The parts seem all to belong to each other. The Old Testament is incomplete looking forward to the New, and the New is incomplete looking backward to the Old.

Therefore to him who believes that Jesus Christ is God, the Divine origin of the Bible stands safe for ever, no matter how his opinion about it may have to be modified.

Let me emphasise this thought by quoting a few of the many passages showing how solemnly our Lord spoke of the Old Testament as given by God, and as a continual preparation for His coming:

> "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God." "They are they which testify of me." "All things that are written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me." "This that is written must yet be accomplished in Me." "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected?" "This is He of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before My face which shall prepare My way before Me."

V

The Witness of its Power

What shall I say more? Need I remind you of that practical conviction of every earnest Bible student, the conviction which Coleridge expresses when he speaks of the way in which it "finds me." Men feel by their own spiritual experience that the Book witnesses to itself. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit" that the Book is the Book of God. It "finds them" as no other book ever does. Its words have moved them deeply; it has helped them to be good; it has mastered their wills and gladdened their hearts till the overpowering conviction has forced itself upon them, Never book spake like this Book.

Need I point you to the world around, to the miraculous power which is exercised by that Bible, to the evil lives reformed by it, to the noble, beautiful lives daily nourished by it? Did you ever hear of any other book of history, and poems, and memoirs, and letters that had this power to turn men towards nobleness and righteousness of life? Did you ever hear a man say, "I was an outcast, and a reprobate, and a disgrace to all who loved me till I began to read Scott's poems and Macaulay's History of England? Did you ever hear a man tell of the

peace and hope and power to conquer evil which he had won by an earnest study of the Latin classics?

Well, you can get a great many to say it of the study of the Bible, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. You can see the amount of happiness and good that has come to the world even from the miserably imperfect following of it. You can see that the world would be a very paradise of God if it were thoroughly followed. Misery and vice would vanish for ever, purity and love and unselfish work for others would hold their universal sway on earth. The millennium would have begun.

The Book whose tendency is thus to reproduce heaven we may fairly judge to be of heavenly birth. The Book whose beautiful ideals no man, no nation, has ever yet attained, is surely not of ordinary human growth.

I have but suggested briefly these few thoughts of reassurance, the strength and peace of many in the controversies of to-day. Need we be disquieted about a Book that comes to us thus accredited in so many powerful ways? Can we not see with restful hearts that all for which we value it is safe from assault; that, however we may have to modify our notions about inspiration, we never can doubt that it has come to us from God.

CHAPTER III.

POPULAR NOTIONS OF INSPIRATION.

THE previous chapter has been written to steady and encourage my disquieted thinker by reminding him that, however he may have to modify his notions of inspiration, the fact itself of inspiration is practically safe from assault. Whatever difficulties he may find in the Bible, at any rate he never can believe it to be of mere human origin, he never can doubt that it has been so inspired by God as no other book in the world has ever been.

This consideration, I think, should enable him to face his difficulties boldly. I do not at all expect that it will remove those difficulties. He will see clearly that the denier of inspiration would have a far harder task than the upholder of it, and yet he will feel unable to get rid of his difficulties as to the Bible being inspired. "I certainly cannot believe," he will say, "that the Bible is an ordinary uninspired book, yet I cannot get rid of

my disquiet about its inspiration. I read some expressions of its inspired men that seem to me far below the standard of Jesus Christ. I hear of discrepancies in its history, of disagreements with the established decisions of science, of crudeness and imperfection in its early moral teaching, of compiling, and editing, and revising, and re-revising in books that I almost looked on as direct from the finger of God. How can these things be consistent with the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth?"

Now when a man has himself got clear of such difficulties, he feels almost impatient of going again slowly over the steps by which he has gradually attained his own position with regard to this question. And yet it is the wisest way by which to lead another. Short-cuts in intellectual processes are seldom satisfactory.

I have referred in an earlier chapter to the way in which the disquiet of a thoughtful man as to the Bible and inspiration is frequently dealt with by mistaken religious friends. Let us see if his difficulties cannot be met in a more reasonable and reassuring way, that thus he may be helped into a position from which he can, with quiet, restful heart, examine the question of inspiration for himself.

I

Is Disquiet an Evil?

It is a commonplace truth enough that religious doubt and disquiet are not necessarily evil. And yet it is a truth that needs to be often emphasised for the doubting and disquieted. A man's doubt, if it be candid, honest doubt,[1] may be as much a gift of God as other people's belief, and may ultimately accomplish as widespread good. Not unwisely has the poet said:

> "There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds;"

and there are times when it may be sinful to shake off such doubt. For men disquieted about the Bible such as I am addressing, it would probably lead to a vague uneasiness on a wider subject, and tend to loosen the foundations of all belief in religion and in God. To deny inquiry is but to increase doubt. Involuntary doubt cannot be sinful, for how can that be sinful which a man cannot help? And if he cannot believe, what else can he do but doubt? Blessed are they who have no doubts to disturb their quiet, but blessed still more are they who through doubt and darkness have won

[1] Surely it is not necessary for me here expressly to exclude immoral doubt, or that silly boyish affectation that apes the doubter because it looks clever to do so.

their way to a higher knowledge of truth. It is the highest faith to believe that to those who, with humble, honest heart, are seeking the truth at any cost, God will give His assistance to find that truth, and His pardon if they miss it. "If," says an old writer, "after using diligence to find truth, we fall into error where the Scriptures are not plain, there is no danger in it. They that err and they that do not err shall both be saved."[1]

II

On "Letting Sleeping Dogs Lie"

Therefore one should inquire reverently but fearlessly into the truth about his disquiet. Nothing is above Truth in the estimation of God. Truth is of God whether it bring us disquiet or no. And it will not ultimately do so if we have faith in it and in Him.

Never, then, be content to "let sleeping dogs lie." For, first, it is an ignoble thing to do. It shows a want of real faith in God and in truth. And it is also a dangerous thing to do. For most frequently these are the watch-dogs of God to warn you of corruption eating into your beliefs. If you try to quiet them and keep them sleeping, you will find some

[1] Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants.*

day that your faith has been corroding unnoticed. And besides all this, even for your own quiet's sake it is the most foolish way to treat them. If your little child is afraid of some bogie in a dark place, he will always have misgivings in passing that place, until you have gone with him to drag it to the light and he sees it is but a white sheet hanging on a pole. And if you are afraid of some bogie in the Bible that seems to be threatening your religious belief, you will always have a secret misgiving until you have boldly dragged your bogie to the light. It may do you good by showing that your belief needed to be corrected; it may vanish altogether when carefully examined by the help of wiser eyes than your own. In any case drag it out. Never, if you can help it, let sleepings dogs lie. They will disturb you continually by growling in their sleep, and some day they will spring up and rend you.

III

The Confidence of Scholars

When a man has learned that his disquiet may possibly be not an evil but a good, not so much Satan's temptation as God's method of teaching, a further help and reassurance will come to him from the reminder that eminent scholars and theologians,

men of deep and unaffected piety, have been for many years familiar with the worst of those facts that are so disquieting to him, and that to them they never cause any disquiet at all. Whether one can understand it or not, it must be a great source of confidence to find the closest and ablest criticism of the Bible consistent with the deepest faith in its teaching and the strongest conviction that it is inspired of God. Nay, more. One finds in intercourse with such men that their closer investigation has but resulted in making the Bible to them a grander and nobler and more God-like book than it had ever seemed before. They have shaken off the petty theories which hindered their full appreciation of its Divineness. They have sought the truth, and the truth has made them free.

IV

The Bible through Coloured Spectacles

The next step in the removal of his disquiet begins with the suspicion that perhaps, after all, it is not so much inspiration that is in danger of overthrow as the theories that men have made for themselves with regard to it. There are few more curious phenomena in the history of human thought than this of the pertinacity with which

generations of sensible men have clung to baseless theories of their own about the Bible, and insisted on identifying the truth of inspiration with the truth of their own foolish notions about it. They have, as it were, fashioned for themselves coloured spectacles through which the Bible is to be read; they have placed them for generations before the eyes of their children, and the consequence naturally is that the colour has become identified with the Bible itself, and caused false ideas and doubt and disquiet. What a relief to a man to learn that it is the spectacles and not the Bible that ought to be put away; that the worst of the difficulties and disquiet disappear if the Book be but read without false preconceptions!

One of the greatest dangers to men's faith in the Bible will disappear when they realise this simple fact. The secularist, equally with his audience, has from childhood used coloured spectacles in reading the Bible. Neither he nor they can conceive any other view of it than that which they are accustomed to. Therefore his arguments come with the force of strong conviction, and their minds are ready to feel the full power of them.

A book of this colour cannot be Divine.

The Bible is certainly a book of this colour.

Therefore the Bible cannot be Divine.

There is no evading the conclusion. No—until some one suggests the removal of the glasses, and, lo! arguments and disquiet have both disappeared!

V

Danger of Popular Notions of Inspiration

When the question is asked then, If inspiration be so evident, how is it that men find those difficulties in the way of their belief in it? This is the answer, Because they themselves have put those difficulties there. *They have put in the place of inspiration itself certain popular notions as to what inspiration should be.* They have assumed without the slightest warrant that if God inspired the Bible, He must have done it in the particular way which appears to them the most fitting. It must be verbally inspired, or it must be absolutely infallible, or its style and language must be faultless, or its religious teaching must be perfect from the beginning —at any rate, it must be something which in their opinion is necessary for a book inspired of God.

God did not tell them anything of the kind, but they thought it must be so. It was a pardonable mistake. It arose from a deep loving reverence for the Bible, and for the God who gave it. But it

was a mistake all the same, and has resulted in serious injury to the Bible.

Men have taught these notions to their children as part of the meaning of inspiration. By and by these children as they grow up find some part of the Book which fails to satisfy these notions, and immediately they begin to question its inspiration instead of questioning the truth of the notions that had been taught them.

This confounding of inspiration itself with the popular notions about inspiration is one of the commonest mistakes both with believers and unbelievers. It is a most instructive study to examine the usual infidel attacks upon the Bible, to find that nine-tenths of them are directed against what are really but popular notions which the more educated Christians have long since left behind, and to see good men defending these notions with a terrible earnestness as if religion itself depended on their truth.

What a source it would be of calm and assurance if people would only learn that it is these popular Christian superstitions about the Bible that are mainly accountable for the present disquiet; that almost every hostile attack that one knows of derives its strength from the unfounded belief that these things are implied in the fact of inspiration.

Why, reader, if that be true, does not the worst

of our difficulty about the Bible at once disappear? No man would dream of being disappointed at the spots on the sun, or of losing his enjoyment of an exquisite "Madonna" or "Ecce Homo" because of a tiny scratch on the corner of the robe. And no earnest man, as he gazed into the wonder and glory and beauty of Scripture, could ever bestow a thought on its infinitesimal flaws were it not for this, that the existence of even one of them, according to the popular superstition, is impossible in a real work of God. He is told not to believe his eyesight; such flaws are not there. How could they be in the image that fell down from heaven?

Should it not strengthen a man's heart if one could prove to him that such teaching as this is superstitious and wrong? The Bible did not fall down from heaven. It was not, as the old illuminations picture it, copied from golden books held open by angels in the sky. It was written by men—men inspired of God, it is true, but yet men with human hearts and human frailties and human feelings. It was written in the most natural way, with exertion of hand and heart and brain, as we ourselves would write. We know that it came from God in the sense that God inspired it for the spiritual guidance of the world; that a noble influence and a Divine teaching emanated from it. But

the fact that it was thus inspired of God did not change this living, throbbing, human Book into a dead, gilded idol. That is what we have done to it. We have bound together into one volume, and tried to level into dead uniformity, a number of separate writings, history, poetry, drama, epistle, prophecy, parable, written by different writers, of different temperaments, at different times, with different purposes, and, for aught we know, with different degrees of Divine illumination. This collection of living utterances given for our use we have almost treated as a fetish for our worship. We have attributed to it every quality that seemed to us an excellence without asking whether we had reason for doing so. We have made God responsible for its every passing reference to history or science —nay, for even the author's name at the head of every writing. Thus the intelligent veneration for a nobly inspired Book has degenerated into a foolish reverence for an idol; the faith that should have assimilated the *spirit* of the Bible has become a superstitious worship of letters and words.

History shows that this is no unusual thing to happen with the objects of men's reverence. The Jewish Rabbis, in their reverence for the Mosaic Writings, declared that God handed them written to Moses from heaven—nay, so perfect, so ineffably

Divine was the book, that Jehovah Himself spent three hours a day in the study of it! The Mohammedans assert of their Koran that it was communicated direct by the angel Gabriel from the original which is preserved in heaven; that it was written in absolutely perfect Arabic; that every syllable is of Divine origin; that it is entirely infallible and authoritative on every subject of which it treats; that is has through all the ages been preserved from error and from the inaccuracy of copyists by the miraculous guardianship of God Himself.

Mere superstition, you say, my reader, of course there is no ground for such assertions as these. Quite true. But does it not show us the tendency of men with regard to any object of great veneration, and should it not make us very cautious of dealing similarly with the Bible?

I say that we *have* so dealt with it. We have asserted pretty much all these things about it. We have claimed for Moses and Paul and Matthew more than they ever thought of claiming for themselves. Of course, we thought we should know better than they. We have spoiled the life and beauty and naturalness of the Book by our superstition about it. And we have so exposed it to the assaults of its enemies that the veriest tyro in infidelity can find vantage-points from which to assail it.

It should, I repeat, be reassuring to have it impressed on us that the Bible is not responsible for these burdens which men have tied upon it; it should make us less disquieted amid hostile assaults, and it should certainly make us resolved to help in the overthrow of such superstition, and give room for the freer growth of a reverent, intelligent belief in the holy oracles of God.

VI

A Challenge

And now, reader, before we go further, it seems necessary to point out and to challenge distinctly the most mischievous of these "Popular Notions of Inspiration." Up to this we have but accused them generally as "Popular Views" or "Traditional Notions." Now, like the knights at the lists of Ashby, we have to ride openly at each of the tents, and strike with ringing blow and with sharp end of the spear the shield of each foe with whom we mean to do battle, for the sake of the Bible and our disquieted brethren.

I. THE THEORY OF VERBAL INSPIRATION, WHICH ASSERTS THAT GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF SCRIPTURE IN THE SAME SENSE AS MILTON IS OF THE "PARADISE LOST," EVERY CHAPTER, VERSE, WORD, AND LETTER BEING DIRECTLY DICTATED BY HIM.

II. THE IGNORING OF THE LARGE HUMAN ELEMENT IN INSPIRATION.

III. THE BELIEF THAT AN INSPIRED BIBLE MUST BE ABSOLUTELY INFALLIBLE IN EVERY DETAIL, EVEN IN SECULAR SUBJECTS.

IV. THAT THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL TEACHING IN AN INSPIRED BOOK CAN NEVER AT ANY PERIOD BE CRUDE AND IMPERFECT.

V. THAT EDITING OR REVISING, OR MISTAKING THE AUTHOR'S NAME, GOES FAR TO DESTROY THE INSPIRATION OF A BOOK.

As we chose the simile of the lists of Ashby, so we choose the number of its warriors' tents, and challenge the five that stand in the forefront the chief amongst the Causes of Doubt and Disquiet.

The first is already passing to his end, scarce worthy our chivalry to strike him to the ground. But the others are strong to do vigorous battle, and are cherished in the hearts of many Christian people.

One by one they come before us a little later on.[1] At present we but challenge them and look them in the face, and deliver one more blow before this chapter closes.

[1] Book II. chaps. iii., iv., v., vi., vii.

VII

Are we bound to any Theory of Inspiration?

But it will be asked, Am I not bound to accept these beliefs? Does not my belief in inspiration compel me to believe that every statement of the Bible history is miraculously guaranteed against the slightest inaccuracy; that its writers were infallibly guarded from mistake in questions of astronomy and geology; that no inspired man could give utterance to faulty religion or morality; that every book of the Bible is equally valuable; that every word must be understood in its plain, literal sense; that a story like, for instance, that of Satan's conversation with God about the fate of Job must be an exact literal report of what actually occurred, since, of course, God could not have inspired for the teaching of religious truth a piece of semi-imaginative dramatic poetry?

To all which questions I emphatically reply, No. Whatever conclusion you come to on such matters, your belief in the fact of inspiration need be in nowise affected.

There is, as I have said, a common opinion that Christianity is pledged to these and such like particular beliefs about the inspiration of the Bible, and that if any of these beliefs be called in ques-

tion, then the inspiration of the Bible is in danger of being disproved; nay, even Christianity itself is in peril!

But where is it laid down that the nature of inspiration must be such as to guarantee these things? Absolutely nowhere!

Certainly not in the Bible. For, strange as it may seem at first, a little consideration will show that the Bible itself nowhere directs us what we are to believe about inspiration. Indeed, the Bible says very little of its inspiration at all beyond merely asserting the fact. It leaves us entirely to our own judgment as to its nature and extent, and as to what is involved in the fact of a book being inspired.

Nor has the Christian Church, the witness and keeper of Holy Writ, ever laid down for her children any theory on the subject. Looking back from "the present disquiet," one can hardly miss seeing a striking indication of that Divinely promised guidance which was to be hers for ever. In different ages, as we shall see, the belief about inspiration varied; now it was lower, now it was higher. What a temptation to the Church of any particular age to stereotype for posterity its own theory on a subject so important!—far more important, surely, than many of the abstruse theological

dogmas on which the greatest councils spent their strength. Yet, in spite of the enormous importance of the matter, in spite of the differences of opinion about it, no creed nor decree nor article of the Church ever made it binding on clergy or laity to receive one theory of inspiration rather than another.

If then, neither the Bible nor the Church has pronounced on the matter, how dare any man attempt to take our liberty away? We can only submit at the peril of our faith, for the sharpest attacks of infidels and the sorest perplexity of Christians derive their strength from the widespread belief that Christianity is committed to certain beliefs in inspiration. This is not so. We are only bound to believe in the *fact* of inspiration; we are free to differ widely as to what it may involve.

If we find that there are certain phenomena of the Bible which we cannot reconcile with the popular theories of inspiration, it need be no cause of disquiet, as these theories may quite possibly be wrong; they only rest on human authority or human assumption. Our belief in inspiration is bound up with no theory—the main facts of Christianity would remain unshaken even if we accepted the lowest theory ever seriously propounded.

Nay, we may go further and say that *the fundamental truths of religion are not dependent even*

on the belief in inspiration at all. For example, every argument of Butler and Paley would be equally cogent to a man who believed in no supernatural inspiration, but regarded the Evangelists as "four men of common honesty and common intelligence." The all-important question as to whether Christ so lived and spoke and died and rose from the dead does not depend at all on their inspiration, but simply on whether they were competent and trustworthy witnesses. Why do I point out this fact? Certainly not because I wish to under-estimate the importance of a firm belief in the inspiration of the Bible. But I want to shake loose as far as I can the tenacious prejudices which so hinder a candid inquiry into the nature and extent of inspiration. I want to emphasise the fact that we are quite free to discuss the question suggested in this book without any apprehension of disturbing the foundation of our most holy faith. To take the most extreme case: even if we regarded every writing in the Bible as uninspired, we need not for that reason give up our faith; though, of course, the Bible would lose for us enormously in value. If, then, the foundations of our religion are so little dependent on certain popular theories of inspiration, if the Bible has left the question open, if the Christian Church dur-

ing 1800 years has never formulated an authoritative opinion as to what is implied in the fact of a book's being inspired, why should we not feel as free about theories of inspiration as we feel about theories of the weather or the tides?

CHAPTER IV

HOW TO FORM TRUE NOTIONS OF INSPIRATION

I

The Wrong Way

THIS is an important subject to deal with, since most of the present disquiet results from the wrong methods of theorising practised in the past. The wrong method I have especially in view is that very common one of assuming that because we think God *ought to* act in a certain way, therefore God must infallibly have done so. This is a very unsafe proceeding. For one so often finds that God does *not* do the things we had settled that He ought to do or must do. It has been often pointed out that if experience had not taught us the contrary, how very confidently we might assume that if God gave man a revelation at all, He *must* have made it accessible to all men, or at least that He must have so given it that when it did become accessible to any there could be little or no danger

of misunderstanding its meaning. But we find that these assumptions are quite unwarranted. We do not make them, simply because they are so clearly disproved by facts. But the whole history of inspiration theories is a record of assumptions equally unwarranted which were received in their day as articles of belief, and to which often the very truth of God was pledged, but which are now not only disbelieved, but almost forgotten.

To give a few instances, which will at the same time help to substantiate my charge that Christians have been as foolish about the Bible as Mohammedans about the Koran. In the sixteenth century it was positively maintained that the vowel-points[1] in the Hebrew Scriptures were inspired, because God *could not* have left the correct reading of any word in the least degree uncertain. When, after a time, this was questioned, and some scholars ventured to assert that these vowel-points were not invented for a thousand years after the Old Testament was completed, they were at once charged with being "unsound on inspiration." Well, we all know now that these scholars were right, and at present this old dispute is almost forgotten, and inspiration remains just where it was.

Then men laid down that because God was the

[1] See the author's *Old Documents and New Bible*, p. 14.

author of the Bible, it *must have been* written in faultless language and style (exactly the Mohammedan assumption about the Koran). How could God's own Word be in inferior Hebrew or Greek? To say such a thing would be to discredit His authorship of it. But this too was found to be a mistake. The Bible was *not* written in faultless language and style, and men gradually learned that this was not necessarily involved in inspiration.

Again, so strongly was it believed that the Word of God must have been miraculously preserved from the slightest error of copyists, through all the ages, that quite lately, when the Revised Version disclosed the many little slips that had taken place in the copying of manuscripts, it seriously disturbed people's faith in the Scriptures. In fact, it was publicly asserted in the Convention of the American Episcopal Church that "not all the assaults of scepticism have so shaken the ancient reverence for the Scriptures in the minds of Christians at large"! Why? Just because men had calmly assumed that God *ought to* have miraculously guarded the fingers of copyists from making the slightest mistake. God did not tell them He had done so. They had no warrant for thinking He had. But they assumed, and made it part of their belief in inspiration, that He must have done so,

and therefore their belief in inspiration itself was shaken when their false belief was overthrown.

I need not go on to speak of other such beliefs that have already passed or are now passing away. As, for example, that all the Psalms were written by David; that Creation was finished in six days of twenty-four hours each; that to deny that the sun went round the earth would be to deny the divinity of Christ, who said, "He maketh the sun to rise," &c., &c. Enough has been said to show how misleading and even dangerous to the faith of simple men is this habit of making unwarranted assumptions and binding them up with the belief in inspiration itself, so that when the one is overthrown in the minds of men the other seems shaken to its very foundations.

We can afford now to smile at such beliefs, but they were very real to the people who held them. And perhaps some of us who smile at them are not so very much wiser after all. What of our own popular beliefs about the Bible? Without entering just now into the question as to their truth or falsehood, is it not clear to any one who thinks about it that some of the popular beliefs about inspiration that are most tenaciously held by the majority of Christians to-day are just as unwarranted assumptions as those which have been long since exploded?

Our grounds for them are just the same as those of our ancestors for theirs—that God *must have* made the Bible so-and-so; that it *stands to reason* He would have done so, &c. And yet if any one of these beliefs of ours gets disturbed we are just as frightened as were our ancestors when their beliefs were overthrown; just as ready to say, "If this be not true, then the Bible is not inspired." What wonder that the assailants of the Bible should take us at our word?

Who told us that God must inspire the Bible in our way, not in His own? Who are we, to judge of the extent of knowledge and the degree of assistance that He must have given to the inspired writers? When are we going to profit by the lessons of the past, and give up confidently assuming that because in our opinion God *must have* done so-and-so, therefore He has certainly done so, or if He has not we must refuse to believe in inspiration? Wisely, but with little result, Bishop Butler told men a hundred and fifty years ago: "*We are in no sense judges beforehand* by what methods and in what proportion it were to be expected that this supernatural light and instruction should be afforded us. The only question concerning the authority of Scripture is *whether it be what is claims to be,* not whether it be a book of such sort and so pro-

mulged as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing a Divine revelation should be. And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor various readings, nor early disputes about the authors, nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more considerable than they are, could overthrow the authority of Scripture, *unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord had promised that the book containing the Divine revelation should be secure from those things.*"[1]

II

The Right Way

Well, if this be the wrong way, then what is the right way to learn the truth about inspiration? The right way is *to question the Bible itself*—to finally accept no popular beliefs or strongly maintained assumptions until you have "searched the Scriptures whether these things are so."

In other branches of knowledge philosophers have long since recognised that this is the only true method of investigation. Men used to study Nature as they now study the Bible, by assuming certain propositions as true and deducing the conclusions that followed from them. Astronomers, for example, assumed that the heavenly bodies *must* move in

[1] *Analogy*, Part II. chap. iii.

circles, because their motion must be perfect, and the circle is the most perfect curve. All the observed facts had to be somehow explained so as to fit in with this assumption, and the result was puzzle and confusion and want of progress in learning, just as in the case of the Bible to-day. But Francis Bacon three hundred years since taught men a wiser plan. "Question Nature herself," said he, "and she will answer you truly. Clear your mind of preconceived notions, examine the facts and appearances of Nature, and see what theory you can form to include them all." And thus he revolutionised the study of Nature so that it became fruitful of abiding results.

This "inductive" method, as it is called, is what we must adopt in studying inspiration. We must give up the old method of assuming that certain things *must be true about the Bible,* and arguing then from these ungrounded assumptions. We must follow the Baconian rule, "Question the Bible itself and it will answer you truly." Our theory of inspiration must be learned from the facts presented by the Bible, and in order to be correct it must be consistent with all these facts.

Let me illustrate this method by a simple example. I want to find out what I can about inspiration. God has nowhere revealed to me

what it exactly is. He has told me that it is a Divine influence, an inbreathing of the Holy Ghost on the spirit of the ancient writers. But I cannot tell how much that means or what effects I should expect from it. I have, therefore, no way of finding out except by examining the phenomena presented by the Bible itself.

I think I discover that the Book differs from other books in being full of God. God-like thoughts flow forth from its prophets and psalmists. Its predictions tell of mysteries that only God could have revealed. Its history differs from other histories in having always a "Godward aspect." It discovers God under and behind all the phenomena of life. While other histories merely tell of wars and defeats, of successes and failures, of kings and deliveries in a nation, this Bible history, with a mysterious Divine insight, pierces behind the veil and shows an overruling guidance ordering these seemingly chance occurrences. It sees God. It reveals God. I seem to learn then that this God-like teaching, this Divine insight, is to be made the chief part of my idea of inspiration.

Then as my study continues there seems borne in on me the conviction that the Book has a mysterious power of rousing men to grander, nobler lives; that the study of it tends powerfully to deepen the

sense of sin and arouse the desire of righteousness; and so this wonderful spiritual power comes to be included in my gradually developing idea of what inspiration implies.

As I go on I find the prophets and others asserting clearly their consciousness of being directed, moved, borne along, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and I am inclined to add to my notion of inspiration this consciousness on the writer's part of being God's inspired messenger. But further study teaches me that other writers, as the evangelists, seem to show no such consciousness at all. St. Luke only mentions as his reason for writing, that he had a more perfect acquaintance with what he tells of; and St. John's claim is, that he was an eye-witness of the events. Therefore I suspend my decision, or I say, "No; this consciousness on the writer's part must not be made an essential part of inspiration; it may perhaps be possible for a man to be specially inspired by God without his knowing it."

I may then perhaps think myself warranted in assuming that this direction by the Holy Spirit involves absolute immunity from the slightest error in history or science of any kind. Therefore I make my idea of inspiration include this. It is no harm to make such a probable assumption so long as I am determined to test, and, if necessary, correct, it

by the facts. Some day an objector points out an inaccurate remark about some scientific matter, or what seems a discrepancy, say, between the histories of Kings and Chronicles. If I cannot explain this satisfactorily, I begin to suspect that I am proceeding too fast, and that I am not warranted yet in including in my idea of inspiration absolute infallibility of the writers in every department.

And thus, step by step, now arriving at some new notion to include in my idea of inspiration, now modifying or perhaps rejecting it as fuller knowledge comes to me, I gradually reach by a right scientific method the true meaning of the inspiration of the Bible.

See what an immense relief it is to proceed in this way. When I start with the popular assumptions that inspiration must include this, that, and the other idea, I am kept continually disturbed whenever an objector points out how the Bible fails to satisfy these requirements. If I base my theories only on a strict examination of the Bible itself, the objector becomes at once only my helper towards the truth. I am not in the least afraid of investigating his facts. If he triumphantly points me out a historical discrepancy or an unscientific statement, it brings no fright or disturbance to me. I say, if he is right about that, I must have been wrong in form-

ing my idea of inspiration. I thought it included absolute immunity from error. God did not declare that it was so, but I thought it was. I find I was wrong. I must correct my theory.

And thus, with restful heart, I am ready to face candidly questions that are torturing other men, because I think it best humbly and reverently to examine the phenomena presented by the Bible in order to find out what God *has* done in inspiration, rather than confidently to assume that because, in men's opinion, God *must have done* so-and-so, therefore He has certainly done so.

This is the true way of learning about inspiration. There is no other way of keeping myself clear from disquiet; no other way of forming a belief in inspiration that will not be in constant danger of being shattered by the logic of facts.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OF NOTIONS OF INSPIRATION

In order to show that these popular notions about the Bible are but mere matters of opinion on which good men in all ages have differed, it may be well here to examine very briefly what has been prominently held and taught in the past as to the nature and extent of Biblical inspiration. The reader will notice that the fact itself of inspiration is always unquestioned. He who denied it would be regarded as "an infidel."[1] The only difference of opinion is as to what is implied in the fact of a book being inspired; whether, for example, it meant verbal inspiration; whether it excluded a human element; whether it secured immunity from mistakes; whether it made every precept absolutely perfect and applicable to all time, &c., &c.

[1] *E.g.*, "For either they do not believe the Divine Scriptures to be spoken by the Holy Ghost, and then they are nothing but infidels."—*Eusebius, H. E.*, v. 28.

I

The Jews

We begin with the belief of the Jews in the days of our Lord and in the early centuries of Christianity. There can be no hesitation in asserting that they held the very highest and most rigid theory of verbal inspiration. The living voice of the prophets had ceased, and a formal literalism, the frequent accompaniment of a decaying religion, was supreme in all the study of the Bible. The famous Philo Judæus, in the first century, following very much the Greek notions, speaks of inspiration as a kind of ecstasy. The prophet, he says, does not speak any words of his own, he is only the instrument of God, who inspires and speaks through him. But he says there are degrees of being inspired; that all have not the same depth of inspiration. More rigid still were the later Jews in the early Christian centuries. In their eyes every word, every letter, every unusually formed character, was Divinely intended, and could not be other than it was without error. Their belief is well indicated in the tradition that when Moses ascended the mountain he found Jehovah making the ornamental letters in the book of the Law! They were most scrupulous in recording every little

peculiarity of writing, every correction or variety of reading; they counted every verse, every word, every letter; they recorded how many times each separate letter of the alphabet occurs, and invented memorial signs to remember them by; they told how often the same word occurs at the beginning, middle, or end of a verse, they gave the middle verse, the middle word, the middle letter, of each book of the Pentateuch; they would not dare to alter in the text even an evident mistake, but had an intricate method of indicating it in the margin.[1] "My son," said Rabbi Ishmael, "take great heed how thou doest thy work—for thy work is the work of Heaven—lest thou drop or add a letter of the manuscript, and so become a destroyer of the world."

Such facts indicate clearly their beliefs that the Bible was verbally inspired in every jot and tittle; that, of course, it was absolutely infallible in every department; that every precept of the Law was of the highest perfection, and could never be superseded. Nay, so far did their belief go, that even the oral commentary on the Law become regarded as infallible, and was asserted to have been given by God to Moses when He gave him the written Law. For it could not be thought that a perfect

[1] See the author's *Old Documents and New Bible*, p. 91, &c.

Law could have an imperfect commentary, or one of less authority than that of Jehovah Himself.

There is no question but that these extravagant notions were providentially used for the preservation of the Old Testament text. Men with such beliefs were marvellously fitted for the task of transmitting the Sacred Writings for centuries without mistake. But they were fitted for nothing higher. I do not say that many an honest heart was not nurtured in true religion on these beliefs. But such slavery to the letter of Scripture made men in a great measure incapable of winning for themselves the deep knowledge of its spirit. They were the petty formalists of New Testament days whose Bible teaching was so sternly censured by Christ; the men, who, in bigot zeal for the Word of God, could persecute to the death the Son of God Himself.

It is curious to find that, with these notions, they nevertheless seemed to believe in different grades of inspiration: the Law stood far and away the highest of all; the Prophets came next in rank; and lower still, the Psalms and other writings. One cannot easily see how they made this consistent with their belief in a mechanical verbal inspiration.

II

The Early Church

As the reader will expect from what has been said of the growth of the New Testament, we are not likely to find any very definite theories about inspiration laid down in the earlier days of the Church. We find everywhere the full acceptance of the Old Testament, the solemn reverence for the words of the Lord and His apostles, and the belief in their Divine inspiration and their deep significance, but no attempt to formulate any theory as to what is implied in the fact of inspiration. Doubtless the influence of the Lord's example and that of His apostles would keep them from that rigid theorising and "worship of the letter" which was so prominent in the case of the Jews. They must have seen that Christ, with all His deep reverence for Scripture, treated it with considerable freedom —nay, even superseded some of the Old Testament by developing it into higher teaching of His own. They must have seen how St. Paul regarded the Law as imperfect; with what freedom the apostles quoted the inspired writers, not at all binding themselves to the very words, but satisfied if they reproduced the spirit of its meaning. Even giving the fullest prominence to the few instances that seem

to militate against the assertion, such as Paul's arguing about the seed and the seeds in Gal. iii. 16, I have no hesitation in saying that a theory like the modern one of verbal inspiration could never have been learned from the Lord and the apostles, and therefore is not likely to have existed in the early Christian Church. It seems to me that the history of the gradual formation of the Canon is a clear proof that it did not exist. Men were content to go on for centuries without definitely deciding as to the limits of the New Testament. They never made it a matter of vital importance. They were satisfied to differ about the few disputed books, and to quote them with a lesser degree of confidence, feeling that there was much of God and good in them, though perhaps they had not come to them with the same high authority as other books. If they had held the modern notions of verbal inspiration such a state of things would have utterly distracted them.

When we come to examine their writings, it is easy to quote passages on one side or the other. To give some examples from the more prominent writers. Clement of Rome (A.D. 90) calls the Scriptures the "true words of the Holy Ghost." Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) says the action of the Holy Spirit on the inspired writers is as that of "the plectrum striking the lyre." Athenagoras (A.D. 170) says it is "as

a flute-player might blow a flute." This certainly looks like a high theory of verbal inspiration, and almost a denying altogether of the human element in Scripture; but, as has been well remarked by the Bishop of Durham, we must remember in such illustrations, which seem to make the writer but the passive instrument under the hand of God, that the tone and quality of the note depends as well *on the instrument* as on the hand which plays it.

The great Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190) seems to have held a very high theory of verbal inspiration and complete infallibility of Scripture. Tertullian (A.D. 200) thought that the Divine communication was made to the writers in a sort of trance or ecstasy; though he thinks, too, that the apostles sometimes spoke their own words, as where St. Paul says, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord." St. Augustine (A.D. 400) speaks of the Gospels as dictated by the Head of the Church, and generally asserts the infallible accuracy of every word of Scripture; though he often expresses opinions inconsistent with this. Eusebius (A.D. 325) is indignant that one should assert the possibility of the Psalmist making a mistake in a name; and another father, Epiphanius, protests against the opinion that the Apostle in a particular passage spoke as a man.

But, on the other hand, we find just as great men,

nay, even the same men on other occasions, freely questioning statements of Scripture. Origen, for example (A.D. 220), the greatest student of Biblical criticism in the Church of his day, though no man could speak more reverently about the inspiration of Scripture, yet bids men neglect the letter, which may be useless, and even calculated to offend, and seek the spirit of the teaching, which is always helpful; he asserts the existence of discrepancies enough in the Gospels "to make one dizzy," and criticises certain precepts of the Law as unreasonable, though he beautifully points to its Divinely ordained purpose—"When the people murmured in the wilderness, Moses led them to the rock to drink; and even now he leadeth them to Christ." St. Jerome (A.D. 380) is most inconsistent in his views. At one time he seems to hold absolute verbal inspiration, at another he speaks of the hopeless errors of chronology; he thinks that St. Mark in ii. 26 wrote Abiathar in mistake for Ahimelech; he criticises St. Paul with the greatest freedom, speaks of his barbarisms and provincialisms, and his weak, inefficient arguments, especially that of the "seed" and "seeds" in Gal. iii. 16. But it is important to notice that he never dreams of treating these matters as inconsistent with inspiration. St. Chrysostom (A.D. 380) sees variations in the different Gospel narratives,

though he thinks it most natural, and a proof that the Evangelists were independent witnesses.

It is interesting to see how clearly the higher spirits of this period recognised that *gradual development* of Revelation, the non-recognition of which so often disturbs people in their Bible-reading to-day. They see that many of the Old Testament precepts are but in concession to a lower moral state. God dealt "after the manner of a schoolmaster or physician, and while curtailing some parts of their ancestral customs, tolerated the rest, making some concession to their tastes; . . . for men do not easily abandon what long custom has consecrated." "Do not ask," says St. Chrysostom, "how these Old Testament precepts can be good now, when the need for them is past; ask how they were good when the period required them. Their highest praise is, that we now see them to be defective; for if they had not trained us well, so that we became susceptible of higher things, we should not have now seen their deficiency." And, again, St. Basil: "The Law, being a shadow of good things to come, and the typical teaching of the prophets, which is the truth darkly, have been devised as exercises for the eyes of the heart, that we may pass from these to wisdom hidden in mystery."[1]

[1] Quoted in *Lux Mundi*, p. 330.

In estimating the notions of Biblical inspiration at this time it is important also to notice the strong belief in the inspiration of the whole body of the Church as being something that was inferior only in degree to that of the writers of Holy Scripture.

But enough has been said already to show that the early fathers, while unanimous in their conviction that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, exercised a considerable freedom of belief as to the nature and limits of that inspiration.

III

The Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages the general current of belief on this subject was not, in theory, very different from that of the early Church. The inspiration of the Bible was firmly held, but we must remember that this inspiration of the Bible was only on a level with that of the traditions of the Church. This position was stereotyped in the decrees of the Council of Trent, by which the Roman Catholic Church still declares that she venerates with *equal* piety and reverence the books of the Bible and the unwritten traditions preserved in the Church by a continuous succession. Remembering the hazy and contradictory nature of these traditions, it

must be evident how this position tended to lower views of the inspiration of Scripture. In fact, one frequently finds the fathers quoted almost as authoritatively as the inspired writers.

And, besides this, there was also a growing tendency to mysticism, which dwelt so strongly on the communion of the individual spirit with God as almost to raise it to the rank of an inspiration of the individual. An illustration of the best class of this mysticism is found in Quakerism to-day. The reader will easily see that such exaggerated belief in the inspiration of the individual and the communications received from the Spirit of God would go far to break down the boundary between the special inspiration of the Bible and the ordinary inspiration of Christian men, from which "all good counsels and all just works do proceed."

It is not easy, however, to gather the main drift of opinion in the Middle Ages as to the questions that are most occupying men's minds to-day. The infallibility of the Bible science and history, for example, was no doubt firmly believed, even though we have the very free speculations of Abelard in the twelfth century that the apostles were liable to error, and that the prophets sometimes spoke their own merely human thoughts. But, in truth, such questions seldom came practically before men,

because it does not seem to have occurred to them that the Bible was to be read in a natural manner as the history of God's dealings with humanity, and that its words were to be understood, like those of any other book, in their plain, natural sense.

An unnatural exegesis grew as a great fungus on the Scriptures. Like the Jewish traditions which our Lord condemned, the corrupted Church traditions and the vast dogmatic systems of the scholastic theologians overwhelmed the free spiritual teaching of the Word of God. It was regarded but as a sort of quarry for proof-texts of the great doctrines of divine philosophy, and any difficulties such as the plain reader might find were easily explained away by an arbitrary system of interpretation.

One of the noblest aims of the men of the Reformation was to restore the Bible to its true position, and to teach men that it simply meant what it said. Unfortunately, however, the leaven of the old teaching soon passed into the later Reformation schools, and in a great degree frustrated this high purpose of the leaders.

IV

The Reformation

At the Reformation came a great change in the position of the Bible. The "infallible Church" had been tried and found grievously wanting, and men in fierce revolt against its abuses and superstitions felt the need of an "infallible Bible" to supply its place as a guide. "The Bible the religion of Protestants," "The Scriptures alone sufficient for salvation," became the watchwords of the movement, and the inevitable tendency was to a very high theory of the nature and extent of their inspiration.

But this tendency only ran to excess in the next generation. With the men who had boldly broken with the greatest authority on earth the danger at first was rather of being over bold with all authority. Freedom of thought, boldness of inquiry, was their great power in dealing with a corrupt Church, and they naturally carried it into other provinces as well. However we may regret opinions which, doubtless, they themselves regretted in later life, we must not judge their impetuosity too sharply at such a crisis. In a life-and-death struggle for liberty of thought it was

almost inevitable that the liberty should at times degenerate into license.

Erasmus held very free views about inspiration and the Canon of Scripture. He refused to believe that the Revelation of St. John is inspired, and thought that, though it may be a blessed thing to believe what is in it, nobody is able to tell what that is. He did not believe in the absolute infallibility of any Scripture writer. Christ alone, he said, is called the Truth. He alone was free from all error.

Luther dared to judge the books of the Bible by his own intuition, and to call that of St. James an "epistle of straw" because it seemed to clash with his views of Justification by Faith. In the contents of Scripture, with the "gold, silver, and precious stones," he finds also "wood, hay, and stubble." "Whatever does not proclaim Christ," he says, "is not apostolic, though written by St. Peter or St. Paul. Whatever does proclaim Christ is apostolic, though written by Judas, or Annas, or Pilate, or Herod." He regards the Book of Job as a historical drama to teach resignation, and thinks that the different writings of Scripture are not all of the same value. Those of St. Paul he holds highest of all, though he does not shrink from criticising some of his arguments. He gives

no countenance to the notion of verbal inspiration, and repeatedly emphasises the great truth so often forgotten in controversies about the Bible, that the Holy Spirit is not confined to a book of the past ages, but dwells and speaks in the conscience of every Christian man.

Calvin, though more reverent and cautious in dealing with the Bible, was a poorer character than Luther, and his views of inspiration were correspondingly inferior. He gave conscience but little prominence in interpreting Scripture, as witness the repulsive tenets of his system. He accepted the morality of the Old Testament as a sufficient rule for Christian men. He thought all parts of the Bible on a level. When Renée, Duchess of Ferrara, daughter of Louis XII., remarked that David's example in hating his enemies is not applicable to us, Calvin sternly told her that such a gloss would upset all Scripture, that even in his hatred David is an example to us and a type of Christ.[1] Perhaps such notions as this account for his burning of Servetus for his beliefs. The men of the Inquisition so justified their acts; why not Calvin?

In the next generation, when the wild excitement had calmed down and the free spiritual thought had partly died away, the Bible passed quickly into

[1] Farrar, *Hist. of Interpretation*, p. 350.

the position that was so natural for it under the circumstances. As in the case of the Jews of old, after the heroes and prophets came the formalist scribes and doctors of the Law; after the warm, fresh wave of inspiration came the cold, petrified worship of the letter. "When the first act of the Reformation was closed and the great men passed away whose presence seemed to supply the strength which was found before in the recognition of the one living Body of Christ, their followers invested the Bible as a whole with all the attributes of mechanical infallibility which the Romanists had claimed for the Church. Pressed by the necessities of their position, the disciples of Calvin were contented to maintain the direct and supernatural action of a guiding Power on the very words of the inspired writer, without any regard to his personal or rational position. Every part of Scripture was held to be not only pregnant with instruction, but with instruction of the same kind and in the same sense."[1]

The exigencies of controversy drove them to fatal extremes. Against the infallibility of the Church they set up the infallibility of the Bible. The Divine factor in inspiration was so emphasised as to completely ignore the human. The writer is but a pen in the hand of God, an amanuensis of the Holy

[1] Westcott's *Introd. to Study of Gospels*, p. 5.

Spirit. The Scriptures throughout are verbally inspired, so that every word and syllable and letter is such as it would have been if the Almighty had written it with His own hand. Every word of them is the word of God. "Whatever is related by the Holy Spirit is absolutely true whether it pertain to doctrine, morals, history, chronology, topography, or nomenclature." And it is rigorously deduced from all this that in the transmission through all the ages the scribes and copyists were miraculously guarded from error or corruption, since otherwise how could we be sure of an infallible Bible?[1]

What a parallel to the formal literalism of the Jews when the life was passing out of their Church! And the parallel becomes more perfect as we find that, as with the Jews, so here also all this so-called reverence for the letter of the Scripture was at a time of a low ebb of real spiritual religion. Never was there more bitterness and bigotry and narrowness of creed in the whole history of Protestantism than in that period after the Reformation when such theories became petrified into articles of popular belief.

Thus, in the rigid scholasticism of the Post-Reformation days arose those false theories about inspiration which men of our day have learned to identify with inspiration itself, and which, in the

[1] A Protestant Synod in Geneva in 1675 formally asserted this.

inevitable recoil from their extravagances, are responsible for so much of our rationalism and doubt and disquiet.

V

In Modern Days

The widespread Deism and infidelity of the eighteenth century was, in some measure at least, a recoil from this extreme dogmatism of Post-Reformation days. The extravagant over-statements about the Bible soon caused a rebound to the opposite extreme. "The devil's last method," says Richard Baxter, "is to undo by overdoing, and so to destroy the authority of the Bible by over-magnifying it." Sceptical attacks fastened on every little inaccuracy or discrepancy that could be detected, and especially upon the moral difficulties to be found in the Old Testament. Such matters should puzzle no one who judges rightly about the Bible, but they were very dangerous weapons in those days of extravagant claims on its behalf. If the Book was "a collection of supernatural syllables" directly dictated by the Spirit of God, if the slightest imperfection in historical or scientific statement, or in moral and spiritual teaching was, as held by theologians, inconsistent with inspiration, the task of the infidel was no difficult one.

The more thoughtful Christians saw that such teaching must be corrected. Yet for generations very little was done. Perhaps the first really effective attempt was that of Coleridge in his *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit,* a book which was not published until after his death. It is the work of a man who really loved his Bible, and whose whole soul was roused within him at the mischief done by the mechanical notions about it which prevailed in his day. He insists on the authority of conscience in interpreting it. He points out the naturalness and fitness of the human element in it. He passionately declaims against the notion that the Bible must be infallible in every jot and tittle in order to show itself inspired of God. So rapt is he in admiration of the nobleness and grandeur of its teaching that it is almost with scorn he refers to the laboured explanations of its few petty discrepancies and difficulties. "Perhaps they can be explained," he says, "perhaps they cannot; who cares a straw whether they can or not?"

It is true his notions tended towards a dangerous extreme. That was only natural under the circumstances. But he certainly roused many to think seriously about the subject, and among them were those worthy to follow in his steps. Kingsley, and Maurice, and Arnold, and others of their kind, car-

ried on the contest, not always perhaps in the wisest and safest way, not always keeping from extreme positions, yet on the whole helping men towards broader, truer views about the Bible. And we are profiting by their work to-day. "Other men have laboured, and we are entered into their labours."

Book II

How God Inspired the Bible

INTRODUCTION

Up to this we have been trying to clear the ground to help the reader into a position from which he may with restful heart examine the question of Inspiration for himself. We have found that the chief cause of the present disquiet lies less in the Bible itself than in the unwarranted assumptions of men with regard to it. We have learnt that not by *a priori* assumptions, but by a scientific inductive method of inquiry can men find the truth about inspiration. And in a brief historical examination we have seen what has been believed in different ages as to its mode and extent.

Now, with the foundation thus laid, we proceed to inquire what we are really warranted in believing on the subject.

The question before us is this:

How did God inspire the Bible? What is implied in the fact of its inspiration? Admitting that the writers of Holy Scripture were inspired, what does that bind us to believe concerning their writings?

II

For example—Did God inspire the Bible so as to exclude altogether the human element? Was the writer merely the pen of the Holy Spirit? Can no idiosyncrasy of the man who wrote, no human passion or emotion or prejudice, be admitted as existing in the "Word of God"?

Did God inspire the Bible so as to make the slightest error impossible in history or science? Does my belief in inspiration necessitate the belief that every statement in Scripture is absolutely infallible, or is it consistent with the belief that sometimes at least such statements may only represent the knowledge of the time?

Or with regard to moral and religious questions. If I believe that in the Bible God has given an inspired revelation to lift up mankind to a higher life, must I therefore believe that He gave that revelation *all at once in its full perfection,* or might it possibly be consistent with a belief in inspiration that His teaching should at first have been cruder and more imperfect? In other words, is it wrong to think that there may be early moral precepts and laws in the Old Testament which are too low and too imperfect for the guidance of Christian men to-day?

Once more. Did God so inspire the Bible that

my belief in its inspiration is necessarily tied to the accepted names of the authors at the head of each book, and to those books having remained absolutely unaltered since they left their original authors' hand? Is inspiration consistent with hard brainwork in searching for information from ancient documents, or with transferring bodily whole passages from uninspired writings? Must later editing or revising by hands unknown to us destroy our belief in the inspiration of a book?

The reader will remember how strongly I have insisted that no prejudices or *a priori* assumptions of the "religious world" shall be allowed to interfere with the answering of these questions; that both the Bible and the Church have left us free to investigate them, and that the true method of doing so is by a careful and reverent but perfectly fearless examination of the phenomena presented by the Bible itself.

It will not be expected that I should here attempt this exhaustive examination. It would take a very large volume indeed to go through the books of the Bible, examining their evidence on even any one of these questions. I have only space to give a few instances of such examination to indicate the lines on which it should be carried out, and to state the results which are universally accepted by all who have a right to speak with authority on the matter.

CHAPTER I

INSPIRATION

I

What is Inspiration?

The answer was once quoted by a great English thinker,[1] referring to a similar question—

> *"Si non rogas intelligo"*—
> "If you don't ask me I know;"

and I think it is the answer most of us would be inclined to give to this question as to what we mean by the inspiration of the Bible. We have a vague notion about it as being some special mysterious influence from God on the Sacred Writings, a notion that does well enough for practical purposes, but is very hard to express when we are asked for a definition. And I doubt if we can lay down any exact definition of it. If a man believes in the actual *dictation* of the words of Scripture by God, believes that God was the author of Scripture in the same sense as Bunyan was the author of

[1] Locke, *Essay on the Human Understanding.*

"The Pilgrim's Progress," then his idea of inspiration is perfectly clear. But if such a theory as that be surrendered, the possibility of sharp, clear-cut definition must be surrendered with it.

The idea of inspiration is by no means exclusively Jewish or Christian. The classical authors frequently speak of the "divine frenzy" or "afflatus," of "being borne along by God," being "God-inspired," &c. Artistic powers and poetic talents, gifts of prediction, the warmth of love and the battle frenzy, were all ascribed to the power of the god possessing the man inspired. These ideas and words afterwards passed over into Christian theological language, and necessarily influenced in some degree the conception of inspiration in the early Church.

The word "inspiration" only occurs twice in the Bible—in Job xxxii. 8 and 2 Tim. iii. 16—but the word does not help us much to the contents of the idea. "Inspired" simply means inbreathed-by-God, which expression may be applied to any degree of Divine influence. In 2 Peter i. 21 the inspiration of "holy men of old" is described as a being "moved" or "borne along" by the Holy Ghost, which seems a stronger expression than "inbreathed." But neither will help us further than this, that "inspiration" means Divine influence.

How, then, shall we define inspiration after carefully examining the facts of the Bible? We must entirely decline to go further than the bare definition given in the word itself: A Divine in-breathing, A Divine influence. For this is the only definition that will cover all the phenomena and no more. This Divine influence, it would seem from an examination of the Bible, might sometimes be a very ordinary matter indeed, merely helping a man to tell more reverently and correctly than he would otherwise do some matter that he had learned by his own observation. It might sometimes too be a power full of marvel and mystery, enabling men to understand the secret things that "belong to the Lord our God." It helped one man to be a historian, another to be an editor of old documents, another to be an architect and designer, another to sing noble soul-stirring hymns. It helped an apostle to write letters of wise counsel for the Church, and touched a prophet's "lips with hallowed fire" to rouse a nation from its evil life.

Though mainly a moral and spiritual endowment, it seems also to have elevated and enlightened the mind. Its manifestations were manifold, and differed in different men. It gave a deep insight into moral and spiritual truth; a perception of God; an elevation of soul; an enthusiasm for righteousness; a

glowing warmth of devotion. It gave too a spirit of wisdom and judgment, a capacity for receiving supernatural revelations, a quickening and enlarging of the mental powers. It gave all these, or only some of them. It gave them in various proportion, manifesting itself differently in different cases.

We must not then think of inspiration as a something always uniform in its action, or always producing some startlingly miraculous result. It seems to be best described by the simple statement that it is God's endowing of men each as he needed for the special work before him.

II

Revelation and Inspiration

It is very important for preventing confusion of thought on this subject to lay down clearly the distinction between Revelation and Inspiration. You *inspire* a life, you *reveal* a fact. "Inspiration is a breath which fills the sails of the moral being. Revelation is as a telescope bringing into range objects which the eye could not discern." Revelation means the disclosing of something unknown before. Inspiration means the inbreathing of the Holy Ghost to produce a more spiritual attitude—a more burning zeal—a deeper love, a

keener insight into God's purposes, or whatever other qualities were most needed for accomplishing the work for which the inspired writer was raised up.

Inspiration, then, may exist without Revelation. Thus, for example, if criticism should prove that no single item in a book was supernaturally revealed, that the facts were all learned in the ordinary way from observation, or from old documents or from the testimony of others, this would not in the least prevent its being an inspired book; it would not in the least disprove the statement that the writer was inspired with a clearness of memory and an insight into the Divine signification of facts, and with more than natural discretion to determine what he should say or how he should say it.

Most certainly all the Bible is not a Divine Revelation. Many things that could not be known by human efforts were miraculously revealed by God; but many more things, of course, needed no such revelation. No revelation was needed to tell the incidents of Jewish history. The study of old documents and the personal observation and memory of the inspired historian were sufficient for this purpose. No revelation was necessary to give the names of the Apostles and Joseph and the Virgin Mother, or the story of the Baptist or

the miracles of our Lord, which the writers or their informants had witnessed. St. Paul needed no Divine revelation to inform him of his own apostolic missionary journeys which he relates in his letters.

The greater part of the Bible, then, was not *revealed* by God, and did not need to be. But we believe *all the Bible was inspired* by Him. Even when the writers used their own observation and memory, or used old historical records, such as the Book of Jashar, or the histories of Gad, and of Iddo the Seer, &c., we can see the need of inspiration, that the value and significance and practical bearing of facts should be rightly appreciated; that things should be seen in their true proportion; that a sufficient record should be made, and that the hand of God should be visible behind the outward history.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO EXTREMES

Introductory

Though, as already pointed out, we cannot accurately define inspiration, or explain its nature, or measure the exact amount of assistance given by God, yet we can, by a careful examination of the phenomena presented, do much to clear our thoughts about it. We can discover whether it must make every statement in the Bible an unmixed utterance of God, or whether it is consistent with a human element of imperfection; whether an inspired document can be fallible, whether inspiration could at any period coexist with lower and cruder notions of religion and of God than those of the Christian world to-day.

It will manifestly help us in our search if we can first lay down definite boundaries between which all inquiries must be confined, outside which we can confidently say the true views of inspiration are not to be found.

Now, there are two extreme theories which mark the limits of thought on the subject for all who believe in any sense in a Divine inspiration of Scripture. On the lower side what, for want of a better name, we may call *Natural,* on the higher side what is commonly known as *Verbal,* Inspiration. If we can dispose of both these as too extreme, we thus narrow the limits within which the right theory of inspiration must lie, and so approach in some degree nearer to the truth.

I

NATURAL INSPIRATION

In the present disturbance of old beliefs on the subject of inspiration, there is an easy, simple theory put forward which, by reason of its easiness and simplicity, is gaining ground with many thinking people, and is uttered glibly and flippantly by many who are by no means thinking people, but who have caught it at second hand from such. The fact that it contains a certain amount of truth makes it, as in all such cases, the more subtle and dangerous.

This theory is, that the Bible is a collection of documents written in good faith by intelligent and trustworthy men, whose work was indeed guided and inspired by the Holy Ghost, but only in the

same sense as the work of every noble writer, be he poet or preacher, who has helped men to truer thoughts of religion and of God. It considers that every great poet is inspired; that every earnest thinker who has a message for his generation is as much a prophet of the Highest as if his works were included within the covers of the Bible. David and Milton, Isaiah and John Bunyan, Plato and St. Paul, exhibit only different manifestations of the Spirit of God. "The Bible writers only possessed in a higher degree a certain form of consciousness which in some degree belongs to all mankind, which is as wide as the world, as universal as God." The inspiration of the prophets who foretold the future was but a deeper insight into the tendencies of life around them. The power to rouse the consciences of men resulted from the holiness of the writer's life. As Burke foretold the French Revolution, so Isaiah foretold the captivity of the Jews. As the words of a holy man of God to-day will "find" and touch people to their inmost hearts, so do the words of the Psalmists and Apostles, because their lives were lived so close to God.

1 (*a*.)

How Far is it True?

No doubt there is a good deal of truth in all this. It would be a great mistake to think that inspired men existed only in the past; that inspired writings existed only in the Bible; that the Spirit of God was not inspiring the hearts of earnest heathen teachers of old and earnest Christian teachers to-day, and by their means lifting men up to nobler conceptions of life and duty. Who would condemn the assumption of the petition in the Liturgy that God in our own day cleanses the thoughts of men's hearts by the "inspiration" of His Holy Spirit? Who would deny that the messages of such men as Luther and Thomas à Kempis and Kingsley and Carlyle were inspired by God for the ennobling and elevating of religious thought?

But surely all this is not inconsistent with the belief that God specially trained one nation for the sake of the rest; that He bestowed *special and supernatural* inspiration on certain men in earlier ages of the world, and by their means revealed to mankind those fundamental notions of Himself and of His will which have formed the basis for all further religious teaching since. Let us, therefore, see what reason we have for our belief that the

inspiration of the writers of Holy Scripture was special and supernatural, something higher than and different from this ordinary inspiration by which men think good thoughts and do good deeds to-day.

1 (*b*.)

What the Writers thought of their Inspiration

In comparing the claim of the Scripture authors with that of other writers, it is well to ask at the beginning, What did these several writers themselves think on the matter? Their testimony ought surely to be worth something as to the secret phenomena of their own souls. And this question brings before us at once the important reply that while our great poets and moralists and teachers never think of claiming a special inspiration of God, never think of prefacing their message with a "thus saith the Lord," several of the Bible writers boldly do so.

Look at the Old Testament. Hear, first, King David's opinion of his inspiration:

> "The spirit of the Lord spake by me,
> And His word was in my tongue."[1]

Hear the word of Isaiah:

> "For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me."[2]

[1] 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. [2] Isa. viii. 11.

Hear Jeremiah's account of his commission:

"Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever I send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Behold, I have put My words into thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations," &c.[1]

Hear Amos, the poor herdsman, when the priest of Bethel attempted to silence him:

"I was no prophet," he cries, "neither a prophet's son, but a herdman and gatherer of sycamore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."[2]

So, also, Ezekiel tells how

"The Spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong upon me."[3]

But I need not multiply examples. Let the reader go through the whole of the prophetic writings and feel the impressiveness of that constant iteration, "The word of the Lord," "Thus saith the Lord." Let him see the half-reluctant prophet groaning under the weight of the "burden of the Lord" supernaturally laid on him, and forced at times against his will to speak when the Spirit of God has come on him with power, and

[1] Jer. i. 5-10. [2] Amos vii. 14, 15. [3] Ezek. iii. 14.

he will have little doubt indeed that the ancient prophets believed themselves to have a special and supernatural inspiration.

Then turn to the New Testament. Read those strong statements of our Lord referred to in an earlier chapter.[1] See the confident assertion of St. Paul as to how he received his Gospel: "For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ." See how authoritatively he heads his writings, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ," as if feeling that here lay his chief claim to be heard. Hear him assert, like the prophets of old, "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord." Thus he thinks of his own inspiration. And if you want to know what he thought of the Old Testament writings, see the many references to them in his letters, where he speaks of them reverently as the "oracles of God"; where he tells what "God said in Hosea," and how "God said in another place, I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" and especially where he so confidently speaks to Timothy of "all Scripture inspired of God," which, no matter how the text may be translated, at least asserts his belief in a special and supernatural inspiration.

[1] Book I. chap. ii.

And so we might go through the rest of the New Testament and learn from various writers their belief that the prophets "searched" what the Spirit of Christ that was in them did signify;[1] that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;"[2] that "God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began;"[3] that "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet."[4] But it is needless to go on multiplying instances to show clearly to the reader that the writers of Holy Scripture were themselves at any rate believers in a *special* inspiration, a miraculous endowment given by God.

1 (*c.*)

Other Considerations

There are many other objections to this theory of natural inspiration which it is unnecessary to dwell on here. There is the marvellous insight of these Bible authors, which so distinguishes them from all others; the Divine prophecies which caused the widespread expectation of a Messiah; the miraculous knowledge, like that of St. Paul, "Behold I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep," &c.

[1] 1 Peter i. 11. [2] 2 Peter i. 21. [3] Acts iii. 21. [4] Matt. i. 22.

There is the wonderful way in which all these separate, unconnected books, with centuries between them, form a complete and connected Bible, as if some Master-mind were directing the plan. There are other reasons, too, referred to in my chapter[1] on the grounds for believing in inspiration. But I need not do more than indicate them here. Enough, I think, has been already said to show that this theory of "natural inspiration" cannot be accepted without utterly ignoring the special and distinguishing features of the Bible.

II

VERBAL INSPIRATION

The reasons above adduced against believing in the theory of natural inspiration are amongst those most prominently brought forward to prove the opposite doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. This doctrine asserts that God is the author of Scripture in the same sense as Milton is of the "Paradise Lost"; that every sentence is of His dictation; that the human writers were but as the pen which the Holy Spirit used, their personality not at all passing into their work; that, therefore, the Bible is entirely Divine, and literally of God's

[1] Book I. chap. ii.

authorship in every line and sentence. To ensure a fair representation of the theory, I quote the opinions of some of its best-known advocates. Professor Gaussen tells us: "The Scriptures are given and guaranteed by God even in their very language." "The Bible," says Dean Burgon, "is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth on the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High, supreme, absolute, faultless, unerring." And another writer (Mr. Baylee) asserts: "Every syllable of it is just what it would be had God spoken from heaven without the intervention of any human agent." In fact, the general notion on the subject seems to be of inspired authors writing infallible histories from Divine dictation, with no necessity for consulting dates or documents or authorities of any kind.

Perhaps some reader will say, "The strong expressions just now quoted from some of the Bible writers, and even from our Lord Himself, convince me that this theory of verbal dictation is most probably true." Well, reader, you will find a good many thoughtful people disagreeing with you. Why? Because, while fully receiving these arguments as a proof of God's inspiration of the Bible, they have

looked a little farther than the surface in order to judge how much God's inspiration implies, and they cannot believe from their examination of Scripture that it implies what is known as verbal inspiration.

They find, for example, clear traces in the histories that the writers, instead of having the words dictated to them by God, had to use their own brains and search old annals and traditions and court archives for materials; they find that, with all their search, there are often some discrepancies in their accounts; they find the evangelists, while fully agreeing in the substance of their narratives, are by no means careful about the literal words —as, for example, in their record of the inscription on the Cross, where no two of them exactly agree; they find St. Paul using such words as, "I speak as a fool," which, though quite natural and fitting for a human writer, would hardly be the words dictated by the Holy Spirit. They find words spoken in the imprecatory psalms which would be very unfit for the lips of our Lord.

They cannot shut their eyes to these things in the Bible, and however they may wish to believe in verbal inspiration, they cannot help preferring to charge these things on the human writers rather than to charge them upon God Himself, for there is no other alternative possible.

And when men begin thus to think seriously about it, disproofs arise for them in every direction. They see that if God were literally the author of the words, in the same sense as Milton and Bunyan are of their own productions, the style and language would always be perfect and always similar, whereas it is really often very far from perfect, and with peculiarities of the writers that can easily be distinguished. They see how loosely the New Testament writers, and even the Lord Himself, quote the words of the older Scripture, clearly showing that it was not in the language, but in the inner substance of the thought, that they were accustomed to see the inspiration. They learn that there is incorporated in our present Bible a considerable amount of ancient literature, from historical and other documents, and they find it hard to believe that God was also the literal "author" of "every sentence and word and syllable and letter" in these ancient, long-lost books.

And they can hardly help asking themselves, too, what would be the good of this verbal dictation of the sentences and words and letters of Scripture unless God had miraculously interfered all through the centuries to ensure their exact transmission down to our own day. The Revised Bible has taught the public what scholars have long

known, that there is often considerable uncertainty about the exact words of Scripture. What advantage would it be to us that God worked a great miracle thousands of years ago to secure that every syllable should be of Divine appointment, if, so far as we are concerned, that miracle has very much failed of its purpose?

But it would be only waste of time to go into a careful refutation of this theory. The time is past in which it would have been necessary. Verbal inspiration is now recognised by most educated people as a theory entirely unsupported by facts, and is fast being thrown to the moles and the bats with the rest of the world's old, discarded mind-lumber.

Thus we find in the first step of our investigation as to how God inspired the Bible, that He did not inspire it in the rigid, literal manner known as verbal inspiration; and that, on the other hand, He did not inspire it merely in the way that He enables good men to write and act to-day. Laying aside, then, both these extreme theories, and thus narrowing the limits within which the true theory must lie, let us proceed to try if we can clear our thoughts still further as to what is and what is not implied in the fact that God has inspired the Bible.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMAN AND DIVINE

I

The Human Element in Inspiration

No candid student can study the phenomena presented by the Bible without finding in it a decidedly human element. If he try to ignore it, the Bible becomes a complete puzzle to him. If he reverently recognise it, the Bible becomes more simple and beautiful. Inspiration is the result of contact between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man; or, perhaps, to put it more definitely, between God the Holy Ghost and the human mind and conscience. Neither of the two factors can be left out of sight; neither, as we saw in the last chapter, can be unduly emphasised without causing confusion. When we read that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," we must keep both sides of the truth distinct.

1. They were moved by the Holy Ghost.
2. They were but men—

men with like weaknesses and prejudices and passions as ourselves, though purified and ennobled by the influence of the Holy Spirit—men each with his own peculiarities of manner and disposition, each with his own education or want of education, each with his own way of looking at things, each influenced differently from another by the different experiences and discipline of his life. Their inspiration did not involve a suspension of their natural faculties. It did not destroy their personality nor abolish the differences of education and character. The cultured scholar wrote and spoke as such; the herdsman or the fisherman showed his provincial training. The poet remained a poet, the philosopher a philosopher, the historian a historian, each with his own idiosyncrasies, ways, and methods; each to be interpreted by the laws of his own literature.

To say this is not to put a slight on the Bible any more than it would be a slight on the earth to say that it is not a perfect sphere; it is but to explain it, to show the truth about it, to make it better understood. It used to be thought that such statements were inconsistent with the dignity of the Scripture, and men who made theories of inspiration without testing them by facts used to assert that the Bible was purely Divine; that the

human writer was little more than a machine; none of his own personality passed into his work; he was but as the pen in the hands of God, who dictated the book; he was but the lyre which was played by the Holy Ghost. But, as has been already pointed out, a more thoughtful examination brought to light facts quite inconsistent with this belief. It was seen that in many respects the inspired books resembled ordinary uninspired works. The language and composition was not always of a high order. Each writer had his own peculiarities of thought and style, his own peculiar excellences and defects, like any modern writer. The historian had to make his books much in the same way as the historians of to-day; he had to gather his information from old documents already existing, from his own observation and memory, from the report of those about him. The writings were tinged by the ideas of the time. The author's scientific knowledge seemed in many cases circumscribed by the same horizon as that of his contemporaries. Some critics even ventured to say that they could detect traces of human prejudice and passions, as when St. Paul, quoting a Greek poet, dubbed the whole race of Cretans as "evil beasts and liars"; or when the Psalmist indignantly cries against his oppressors, "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouths," and

"Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg: let them seek their bread also out of desolate places."

Apart from these considerations altogether, the human element in the Bible is perfectly plain. A large part of it is taken up with the expression of feelings that are distinctly human—loneliness and sorrow, hope and fear, doubt and anguish. We call it all the Word of God, and in one sense rightly, as being all inspired of Him. But we must see that a large part of it is the word of man—the cry of the child in appeal to his Father—the prayers for help, the doubts and questionings, the yearnings after the Unseen God. They are feelings such as our own, and we constantly acknowledge it. Is it not a large part of the charm in a book like the Psalms that it accurately expresses what we ourselves have felt over and over again? To try then "to suppress the human side of the Bible in the interests of the purity of the Divine Word is as great a folly as to think that a father's talk with his child can be best reported by leaving out all that the child said, thought, and felt."

This is God's way of teaching the human spirit. Rightly understood, the presence of the human in the Bible is an increasing and not a lowering of its value as a book of religion for men. But even if it were otherwise, it must be acknowledged all the

same. Whenever we attempt to ignore it or deny it, or make the truth of God's teaching depend upon its absence, we give a tremendous advantage to the enemies of religion.

II

Value of the Human Element

We know that God could, if He pleased, have given His revelation without the intervention of human minds or hands. He could have spoken His truths daily direct from heaven, or delivered them by angels, or written them across the sky, or branded them indelibly on the everlasting hills. They might thus have escaped all corruption in transmission; they might thus have been at once universally published. And it would have been as easy for God to do this as to reveal truth gradually, and sometimes dimly, through the medium of imperfect human minds.

But would such a revelation have met the needs of humanity? Little as we know, is it not enough to show us that God's plan is, after all, the best? In fact, we might ask, What other plan could even an objector propose? Any communication from God to man must be made within the limitation of man's faculties. The divine can only be grasped

by man when defined and moulded according to the laws of his own nature. Therefore a ready-made revelation in ready-made language sent down from heaven scarcely strikes one as a very natural or feasible way to communicate with humanity. At any rate, God did not use such. He used human minds as the channels of His truth, because thus it could be better received and assimilated by the human minds to which it came. He used the men best fitted for each country and each age. He inspired various characters and temperaments. He chose men of different tones of thought to present the different aspects of His many-sided truth, and thus to correct and supplement each other.[1]

The quiet, contemplative John saw things in a different light from the other evangelists. The earnest, enthusiastic Peter, with his narrow views and half-cultured intellect, had to be supplemented by the logical and broader-minded Paul, capable of seeing the universal scope of Christianity, and that all men who had faith were acceptable to God; whilst James, the saintly Judaist, with his

[1] To use the beautiful simile of St. Cyril of Jerusalem to illustrate the action of the Holy Spirit in different men: "One and the same rain comes down on all the world, yet it becomes white in the lily and red in the rose, and purple in the violet and pansies. . . . In itself, indeed, it is uniform and changes not, but by adapting itself to the nature of each thing that receives it, it becomes what is appropriate to each."

practical way of looking at life, saw how easily even the preaching of faith may be mistaken, as if believing were more important than doing, and insisted, like another Baptist, on the central truth of all religion, that

"'Tis only noble to be good."

So, too, the Divine Spirit came to men at various crises in their lives. He came to them in joy, in sorrow, in doubt, in despair, in the confidence of faith, in the fierce struggle with temptation. Through the human spirit, in its varied states, He spake to the universal human spirit as it could never have been spoken to otherwise. He spake through the passionate indignation of Isaiah and the sorrowful plaints of Jeremiah over the wickedness of his race. He touched the hearts of the ancient Psalmists, and we hear their struggle with their sorrow and their sin, and their child-like crying after the living God. He inspired the stern pathos of Hosea sorrowing over the greatest trouble that could come to man, a wife unfaithful to her marriage vow, and by means of his sorrow and his changeless love learning Jehovah's feelings towards His unfaithful people.

Therefore it was that God thus inspired the Bible. He did not care so much about the accent

or grammar or scholarship of His inspired men. For His purpose the throbbing heart, the flashing eye, the soul burning with devotion to God and man, were of infinitely more consequence than the petty accuracies of history and the infallibility that would not let an old-world astronomer express incorrectly a scientific fact. What did these dead trifles matter compared with the sympathy called forth by a man speaking to a man, by a human pulse touching another human pulse, bounding like its own with the hot blood of passion and emotion?

You must believe this if you would understand the Scriptures. God did not stand behind the human stage pulling the wires of lifeless puppets and marionettes. You do not like to talk of the human element in the Bible. You shrink from the idea of any imperfections, any incompleteness, any limitations. You fear to recognise human passions and emotions; they clash with the notions you have formed of inspiration. Fear not. God's light loses nothing of its heavenly purity because it is reflected back from human faces, while man gains all the advantage of the pervading presence of a sympathy which answers to his most varied emotions. Surely God's plan is wiser than ours. How more naturally could men be taught from Heaven? How better could the Bible be made the book for all humanity?

III

Evil of Ignoring the Human Element

"The Law," said the old Jewish Rabbis, "speaks in the tongue of the sons of men." And it were better for the Bible had the Jewish Rabbis, and their Christian followers too, kept that fact always clearly in mind. For a great deal of the *naturalness* of the Bible has been lost owing to the rigid theories that have so long prevailed.

How touchingly would come to us, in its pages, the cry of the human spirit in its ever-changing moods if we recognised it as the cry of a human spirit like our own! With what interest we should watch men struggling with temptation or questioning of the mysteries of life around them if we felt, especially in the Old Testament, that they were ordinary, imperfect men like ourselves, in whom God's great work of character-making was only in progress—men who were being enlightened and ennobled by the Spirit of God, and who, under His influence, uttered naturally their thoughts and aspirations, not some mechanically dictated words from on high!

When in the dark ages of the world, before the fuller revelation came, a godly man fell into a

despondent mood and gloomily spoke of the grave as the end of all things, it would not seem to us at all strange. It would seem very natural and very human. And if we wondered why such words of his were not cut out before his writings were allowed into the Bible, we should say that doubtless God's purpose was best served as it was.[1] And when we found words used in warlike ages that were not gentle and loving enough for the spirit of Christianity, we should remember that those who used them were *men*—men who, though inspired, were as yet but imperfectly taught; whose strong, passionate impulses were not yet entirely chastened by the influence of the Spirit of God. We should think of them in a natural way, as we do of similar cases in secular history. When we read of the Covenanters on the hillside, or the Vaudois villagers in the awful life-and-death struggle for their faith—

> "Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, who rolled
> Mother with infant down the rocks"—

we are not so very much shocked to hear, amid the prayers for deliverance, the cry also for the destruction of their pitiless foes. Not even though they lived in the full light of Christianity. We may think their prayer too harsh for Christians to use, but we feel that, in spite of it, they were noble

[1] See Chapter V.

godly men, able to teach us grand lessons of duty, carrying their lives in their hands for the cause which they regarded as that of God and the right.

Our sympathies enable us to enter into their feelings, because we read their history in a natural manner. But when the Bible history tells us of a similar case, even though it be in the darker ages of the world, all the naturalness is taken out of it by our early preconceptions. Just because it is in the Bible we do not expect the actors to be real and natural! We forget that God used imperfect human beings as the medium of His teaching, and that they did not reach all at once the full height of their spiritual education. And so, instead of half sympathising with the indignant cry of the oppressed for vengeance, instead of regarding it as we would the quick passionate cry of a hurt child running to his father, we charge it as a blot upon the "Word of God."

Is it hard for us to understand how stern, indignant patriots, men who would willingly die for God and their country, should, in their passionate indignation at the cruelty and oppression around them, utter such vengeful prayers as we find sometimes in the Psalms? If so, it is because we are ignoring the human element in the Bible. We think that God should have turned these men into passionless

machines before He ventured to use them for the teaching of their fellows. We would take all the naturalness, all the humanity, out of them if we had the inspiring of them. We would have God use machines, and not impulsive men. Well, God did *not* use machines. God *did* use men, and the sooner we convince ourselves of that fact the more naturally and correctly we shall read the Bible.

IV

The Divine Mingling with the Human

It seemed necessary to emphasise especially the human element in the Bible. It is the side that up to this has been most ignored by religious people, and this ignoring has been in a large measure the cause of the present disquiet. The Biblical studies of the past half-century, too, have tended to show that this human is a larger element than men thought; that the freedom of the authors is much less restricted. It is, therefore, necessary to a true understanding of the Bible that this side should be kept very prominently before us.

But the very necessity in our day of emphasising the human side of Revelation makes it the more incumbent on us not to ignore the Divine. The history of human thought teaches us its continual

tendency to swing from one extreme to another, and, pendulum-like, the more it has swung to one side the farther will be the rebound when it comes to the other. We must guard ourselves against that danger. While recognising to the full the human medium through which the Divine has come to us, we must remember that it is only a medium, that that which is beneath and behind and within it is the power of the Spirit of God.

We cannot draw a line between the Divine and the human. We cannot say of any part, "This is Divine," or "That is human." In some parts, as the Gospels, there seems more of the Divine; in others, as the Chronicles, more of the human. It is as a mine of precious ore where the gold is mingled with the rock and clay, the ore is richer in one part than another, but all the parts are glittering with gold. It is as sunlight through a painted window. The light must come to us coloured by the medium. We cannot get it any other way. In some parts the medium is denser and more imperfect; in others the golden glory comes dazzlingly through. The light cannot be separated from the tint given by the medium. Every ray is mingled light and colour. It is foolish to ignore the existence of this medium. It leads to misunderstanding and disquiet, and wonder that the

light is not absolutely pure. But how much more foolish to ignore the light and deem that the tinted dome is luminous itself, that the light of heaven has only come from earth! There is no noble teaching without the Spirit of God; there is no true light for the soul of man but through "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world."

V

The Written Word and the CHRIST-WORD

A wonderful illustration of the coexistence of the Divine and Human in the Bible is gained from the thought of the two natures in our Lord. Nay, is it not far more than an illustration? Are not the Written Word and the CHRIST-WORD each the revelation of the Divine to man through the human? And does not this, in a great measure, account for the correspondence? Is not this Written Word the imperfect and human presentation of Him who, in His inner essence and nature, is unknowable to us? And may we not reverently say the same of the Eternal "WORD" who was in the beginning with God, and who Himself was God?

In both is the union of the Divine and the human. In Him is the Divine nature shrouded in weak

humanity—in It the Divine Spirit revealing itself through imperfect human minds in imperfect human language. In Him is the Godhead flashing out in His mighty miracles and revelations of the unseen, and the Manhood showing itself in weakness and weariness and hunger and pain—in It the Divinity appearing in prophecy and revelation and lofty moral teaching, and the humanity revealing itself in the warmth of human passion and impatience, and the chill of human despondency and fear. In Him the grand words of God and righteousness and the mysteries of the future alternating (as they must have done) with ordinary trivial words of the daily food and rest and the common intercourse of life—in It the prophecy and revelation and the God-like lesson of nobleness and good mingled with comparatively unimportant stories and genealogies and passages of history that sometimes seem to have but little bearing on the life of to-day.

In Him, too, was a *gradual growth* in wisdom. Had He been omniscient from His childhood He would not have been perfect man. And in It we have a corresponding growth, a gradual development in moral and spiritual teaching, and in clearness of revelation of the Divine mysteries; so that, as the Lord Himself has taught us, the teaching

of the Old Testament days is on a lower plane than that of the New. Nay, we may without irreverence go even further still in our comparison. In Him, even to the end of His earthly life, were certain limitations of knowledge, owing to the restriction laid on Him by His humanity: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, . . . not even the Son, but the Father." If this could be so even in the Christ-Word Himself, need we wonder to find in the Written Word traces of the writers' human ignorance in branches of secular knowledge which were left by God for gradual discovery in the after-ages?

But we must not anticipate the chapters on Infallibility and Development. It may be helpful to many readers to trace out more fully for themselves this correspondence, which is but barely touched on here, between the nature of the Lord and the nature of the Bible. It may help to remove prejudice against truths that are most important for a right understanding of the Scriptures. It may lead some to think of that false expectation of a "Coming One" in perfect majesty and glory which hindered the Jews' reception of the humble Messiah and led them to sneer at "the carpenter's son." It may lead some to ask, "If that false conception of what the Messiah ought to

be was in those days such an obstacle to the acceptance of Christ, may not a similar false conception be an obstacle to the Bible to-day? If Christ had to say, why should not the Bible have to say too, "Blessed is he who shall not find occasion of stumbling in me"?

CHAPTER IV

IS THE BIBLE INFALLIBLE?

I

What Human Theories Claim

I have tried to point out all through this book that most of the difficulties which men find in the Bible arise from their own wrong notions about it; from their making certain assumptions which they are quite unwarranted in making, and then expecting the Bible never to clash with them. Two of these popular assumptions stand out above all the rest as especially fruitful in difficulties. In this chapter we shall deal with the first.

ASSUMPTION I.—*It is necessary for God's teaching of moral and spiritual truths that He should guard His teachers against the slightest inaccuracy in any particular.*

In other words, If the Bible be inspired it must be absolutely infallible, not only in religious but in secular matters. Its writers must have been divinely guarded from error in every detail. Its history, its geology, its astronomy, must be ac-

cepted as scientifically correct, and not merely as representing the knowledge of the time. There is no possibility of any inaccuracy arising from the ignorance of the writers or from error in the sources from which their history was derived.

From this the conclusion inevitably follows that if one can prove any false notions of science or any inaccurate details of history in the writers of three thousand years ago, we must at once give up believing in the inspiration of the Bible.

This seems a very extreme position to take, and yet it is taken in all good faith by a large number of religious people. There is a statement in Dr. Lee's "Inspiration," the chief text-book still on the subject, to the effect that chronological and geographical details, as well as matters of physical science, mentioned in the Bible must in every portion of every book be held to have been stated with infallible accuracy.[1] Let me quote other authoritative utterances:—"God presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, *with the design and effect of making that writing an errorless record.*"[2] If there are any physical errors fully proved in the Scriptures *the Scriptures could not be from God.* But we mean to

[1] Preface to third edition, p. xiv.
[2] Hodge and Warfield in *Presbyterian Review*, vol. ii.

show that there are none, and we shall dare to challenge the adversaries to produce one from the entire Bible.[1] "This infallibility and authority attach as well to the verbal expression in which the revelation in conveyed as to the revelation itself."[2] "*A proved error* in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine but the Bible claims, *and therefore its inspiration* in making those claims."[3]

If this be the only position to take, that a single proved error must disprove inspiration, let us by all means insist on it at any cost of disturbance to our beliefs. But if not, then surely those who take it are unnecessarily causing serious danger to the Bible, putting stumbling-blocks before their disquieted brethren, and giving very powerful vantage-ground for the infidel's assault. We must ask, then, Are we bound to take this position? Nay, further, Is there any warrant at all for taking it?

II

What the Scriptures Claim

Let me repeat again the important words of Bishop Butler,[4] already referred to. "*We are in no sort judges beforehand* . . . by what methods and in what proportion it were to be expected that this

[1] Gaussen, *Theopneustia.*
[2] Hodge's *Commentary on the Confession of Faith,* p. 55.
[3] *Presbyterian Review,* vol. ii. p. 245.
[4] *Analogy,* part ii. chap. iii.

supernatural light and instruction would be afforded us. . . . The only question . . . concerning the authority of Scripture [is] *whether it be what it claims to be,* not whether it be a book of such sort or so promulged as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing a Divine revelation should. And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor early disputes about the authors, nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more considerable than they are, could overthrow the authority of the Scripture, *unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord had promised that the book containing the Divine revelation should be secure from those things.*"

Now, *did* the apostles or prophets or our Lord ever promise that the Book should be free from such things? Does the Bible anywhere make such claim of universal inerrancy for its writers? Has any Biblical writer asserted, or even implied, that he was Divinely guarded from the possibility of ever making a mistake in the little details of his work? Or have some of the writers borne this testimony concerning any of those who preceded them, or has any one writer left it on record that he was commanded by special inspiration to declare the infallibility of the rest?

Most certainly no such statement can be produced.

But some one will say, Surely the fact of inspira-

tion is quite sufficient to prove that inaccuracy in the slightest degree is impossible. Not at all. If God's purpose would be just as well accomplished by histories of ordinary accuracy, like our English histories to-day, we have no right to assume that He would supernaturally enlighten the writers on little details that in no way concern the purpose of the book. For instance, in the Old Testament the sacred writers inform us that much of their history is a compilation from ancient, long-lost sources, the Books of Gad and Iddo the seers, the chronicles of the kings of Israel, &c. We have every reason to believe in the substantial accuracy of these ancient sources, the national annals of the people, but surely we have no right to assume that in no one of them could there have been a slip in a Levitical genealogy, or in the number of King Solomon's horses, or that, if there had been, God must have infallibly corrected it by a miracle, unless, indeed, such minute accuracy were necessary to His purpose. Of this we shall be better able to judge later on.

If the reader has followed me in dropping the extreme theory of verbal inspiration, he must see that, without direct proof from the Bible itself, he is not warranted in asserting of any writer absolute infallibility in every detail. As the mere mechanical pen or mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit writing down or uttering words from Divine dictation, we might

very well have believed in his making an errorless record. But if it be not true that the Bible historian could write without referring to any documents, put down dates infallibly correct without consulting any chronology; if he had to collect his materials like our own historians to-day from the annals of the colleges of prophets, from the archaic books of Jashar and the wars of Jehovah, from ancient traditions, from the records of village and town and court, from his own memory and the testimony of his contemporaries—then it is a very large assumption indeed that no detail of his history or his science or his information on any subject could possibly err. Nothing less than a direct assertion of the inspired writers could warrant such an assumption.

And nowhere, I repeat, is such an assertion made. The writers never claim absolute immunity from error. It certainly is not their fault if we persist in making such a claim for them. For it would almost seem as if the Bible had tried to specially guard us against doing so, particularly in the case of the Old Testament. The inspired historians almost go out of their way to tell us that their histories were no direct revelation from God, that they had to gather the materials from ordinary uninspired writings in the ancient annals of the nation. In such cases as the Books of Kings

and Chronicles they give us parallel histories of the same events that do not at all agree in the smaller details, and sometimes leave discrepancies that seem impossible to reconcile. They are just the sort of discrepancies that would occur in any set of good, trustworthy histories compared together —the sort of discrepancies the absence of which would make one suspicious of collusion in ordinary human narratives. Perhaps they could be reconciled if we knew all the facts. Perhaps they could not. No one that understands the nature of the Bible would care in the smallest degree whether they could or not. But at any rate, they are a standing protest against the dogmatism that would risk the belief in the inspiration of Scripture on the question of some petty inaccuracy of detail.

IV

What Common Sense Claims

God, then, has nowhere told us that inspiration must necessarily imply infallible accuracy on every subject. But still it is said—and this is the chief reason for men's dogmatism about it—"If there were a possibility of inaccuracy in any direction, even though quite unconnected with morals and religion, the Bible would not be trustworthy as a

guide for men. If not absolutely infallible in every direction, how can we feel confident about its infallibility in the one direction where its truth is so vitally important?"

Now, is it reasonable to judge thus of the Bible? Do we ever judge so with regard to other knowledge? Must a man be infallible in *every* direction in order that he may be a trustworthy guide in one direction? Must a physician know all about farming and mining and law and navigation in order that he may direct us in matters of health. Do we regard it as perilous to the doctrine of a preacher if in some quotation in his sermon he mistake the author's name?

Nay, further, should not the whole analogy from God's way of communicating ordinary knowledge lead us rather to expect that His teachers of religion would *not* be made infallible in every direction? We find His ordinary course is to endow certain men with faculties that enable them to deal with particular studies while leaving them in other things comparatively ignorant. The great geniuses in poetry, or painting, or music, or mathematics are but indifferently acquainted with many matters outside their own province. If this be God's ordinary course of teaching in such things, is there not a strong presumption that He has adopted the same course in teaching religion?

Of course God might have made every inspired writer absolutely infallible and omniscient in all the mysteries of the universe. But that is not the question. The question is, Have we reason to believe that God did this? and was it necessary for His purpose that He must do it?

We must always judge of God's unknown dealings by the analogy of His known dealings. And there we find that His method is one of *sufficiency*, not perfection; of sufficiency for the attainment of practical ends, not of conformity to ideal standards. Let us see, then, whether this principle of sufficiency is here carried out. Let us inquire what was God's purpose in giving us the Bible, that we may be able to judge whether such absolute inerrancy is really necessary for the attainment of that purpose.

IV

The Purpose of Scripture

This question of God's purpose in inspiration is one which is easily enough answered. It will call forth, probably, but little difference of opinion. And yet it is a very important question. For by keeping its answer steadily in view we shall best see how unimportant are many of the disputed points which

are causing so much of the present disquiet about the Bible.

What, then, is the purpose of inspiration? Is it to ensure that we shall have clear and infallible information on certain questions of geology and astronomy, or on the way in which God created the heavens and the earth? Is it to keep us from mistakes about the history of Israel; to give us minutely accurate information about the length of every reign and the exact number of men who fell in the little tribal battles of the inhabitants of Palestine?

Surely not. There was no intention of giving us an encyclopædia of scientific knowledge, and thus depriving us of the discipline of acquiring such knowledge for ourselves. The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible knew that these little details of genealogies and battles and such-like in the history of Israel were not a whit more important to us than similar details in the history of England. The Bible has no concern except incidentally with any such matters as these.

Inspiration is concerned with what is to us of infinitely more importance—even the guidance of our conduct, the building up of noble characters for God. It has been well said that conduct forms three-fourths of human life, and it is with these

three-fourths that the inspired writings have to do. Their inspiration therefore consists not so much in their infallible science or minutely accurate details of history, as in their teaching God's will and God's relation to men. One of their own inspired writers tells us of their use. They are all, he says, given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for—what? Mosaic cosmogonies and Hebrew histories? Nothing of the kind. *For doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*[1]

These Scriptures are God's inspired lesson-books for humanity. Their writers are the great masters for the teaching of the world. If a man wants to train himself for poetry or painting or sculpture, he will make himself familiar with the great masters and the great nations and the great writings that have concerned themselves specially with these pursuits. If a man wants to train himself for righteousness and for God, he will make himself familiar with the masters and the nation and the writings inspired for that purpose.

These writings concern themselves with the great moral and spiritual facts, duty, character, moral responsibility, the happiness that comes from harmony with the will of God. Their object is to

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

teach the eternal contrast between Righteousness and Unrighteousness, Obedience and Disobedience, Selfishness and Self-sacrifice, Purity and Lust; to teach men that God is on the side of holiness and good, that His help and sympathy are near in the fierce fight with temptation, and that even when the fight is lost and the life defiled, there is a way back to holiness and God if men will but earnestly seek it.

V

Its Method of Teaching

For the revealing of such truths the Bible was given. But they were not revealed in cut-and-dry propositions dropped down to us from heaven such as:

GOD HAS SYMPATHY WITH MEN.

GOD HATES IMPURITY AND FRAUD.

GOD FORGIVES THE SORROWING PENITENT.

If they had been, we might have reasonably expected absolute verbal infallibility in every jot and tittle. But no. Not through golden aphorisms or finished articles of belief, but through the medium of history and dialogue and poetry and drama did God reveal Himself. In the incidents of the patriarchal history, in the story of the Jewish kingdom, in the fervid utterances of the prophets, in

the intercourse with the peasantry of One who in guise of a poor Galilean workman hid the Majesty of Almighty God—thus were men allowed to gather for themselves their ideas of God and of His will for man. The books of the Bible are the records of his gradual education, moral and spiritual, of the people of Israel, and His revelation of Himself through them to the world outside.

Take, for example, the history of the Judges. Here is a constant iteration of the same lesson. First we see the people sinning and forgetting God. Then comes their punishment at the hand of the tyrant whom God has permitted to work His will. Then the poor distressed creatures crying in their pain and their penitence to Him whom they had grieved. And straightway the deliverer raised up to help them. Soon they are back at their evil courses. Again the old story is repeated, and again we trace the old round of sinning and punishment, and repenting and deliverance, and sinning and punishment, and repenting and deliverance, with the hand of God manifest through it all.

We see at once the main lesson of the book. It is a true record, for our learning, of God's dealing with men. God's inspiration has taught that historian the true philosophy of history: that God stands behind all human life, though it seems to

men as if things happened by chance; that He hates and punishes sin in nation or individual, though men think sometimes that they may do what they will; that it is not by accident, but by the working of God's laws, that the punishment comes; that when the suffering, sorrowing sinner cries aloud to Him in his penitence and pain, He is still "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

VI

What Infallibility is needed

We see then that the purpose of the Bible is that it should reveal God and His relation to man. In it are recorded and interpreted certain historical facts, and the sole value to us of these facts and their interpretation is that the knowledge of them may lead us to the knowledge of the personal self-revealing God, His will, His dealings, His relation to us. This is God's great design for man. "This is life eternal, *that they may know Thee,* the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

The important matter then in the inspired writings is that they should be competent teachers, where alone we need their teaching, as to the relation of God to man and the dealings of God with

man. For this it is necessary that the history should be trustworthy history, that the record of the facts should be substantially accurate, and be sufficient to teach what God wants us to know of His dealings with mankind. But for this is it necessary that the numbers of the armies should be infallibly exact, or that every passing reference to geology or astronomy should be scientifically correct? Would it be very dangerous to religion if an inspired writer thought, with the wisest men of his day, that the sun went round the earth, or if he had to choose between two conflicting accounts of the price paid for Araunah's threshing-floor?[1] What should we say of the man who held such opinions with regard to any other history, who should say, for example, that the lessons of English history were vitiated by the fact that the different accounts of the battle of Crecy did not exactly agree as to the order of battle array, or that one of the mediæval chroniclers believed in the existence of witchcraft?

We must treat our Bibles as sensibly as we treat our English histories. We must see that it was not necessary for God's purpose that every inspired writer should be universally infallible. If a voice from heaven were to-morrow to guarantee to us the

[1] Cf. 2 Sam. xxiv. 24 with 1 Chron. xxi. 25.

absolute accuracy of every little jot and tittle of their history and science, the *real value* of the inspired books would not be one whit increased.

VII

Is the Bible Infallible?

Thus, then, we answer the question, Is the Bible infallible? Yes, the Bible *is* infallible in revealing God and teaching men all that is necessary for salvation. It is infallible in pointing men to Christ and leading them to higher and holier lives. Its infallibility is complete as to its peculiar message as to all that it professes to be and all that it professes to do. "All that it teaches about faith in God, in Christ, in truth, in righteousness, in moral love, in the wisdom of a life spent in the fear of God, has proved its absolute trustworthiness. And as trustworthy are its teachings as to where human life goes wrong, as to where the right way in all matters of conduct lies, as to how a life of righteousness may be attained, as to how manhood may be perfected in a life of likeness to God."[1]

Here the Bible is absolutely infallible. And let us remember this is the only infallibility required

[1] Thomson, *Revelation and the Bible*, p. 252.

of it. Whether it be also infallible in every minutest reference to history or science is a question that need very little concern us. It is a matter of mere literary interest, and as such may be discussed with untroubled heart.

VIII

Danger of Popular Notions of Infallibility

One step farther. Not only is it unwarranted and unnecessary, this insistence on the absolute infallibility of Scripture in every detail; it is also extremely dangerous to men's belief in inspiration. What, think you, made an infidel of Ernest Renan, one of the ablest of modern French writers? The belief that inspiration was bound up with infallibility. What turned the late Charles Bradlaugh into a bitter enemy of the Bible? The fact that the clergyman who prepared him for Confirmation sternly banned the questions of the thoughtful boy because of his own rigid theories about the Scriptures. How many cases does the reader himself know of men's faith being overthrown by such teaching? A few months ago the experience came closely home to me in the overthrow of the belief of one of my closest friends.

Believe me, they are mistaken friends of the Bible

who insist on binding up inspiration with such questions as this. When religious teachers can be found to assert that the existence of a proved inaccuracy would overthrow inspiration, when the plain meaning of words is strained to explain away some trifling discrepancy of numbers, or to reconcile early human notions with the science of to-day, these things bring not gain, but peril to the Bible. One would think our salvation depended on the accuracy of the infant sciences of Israel, or that religion was imperilled if we could not satisfactorily establish that the number of the first-born was 22,273! Until men cast aside such petty notions about inspiration, until they are taught that God's proclamation of the eternal law of righteousness is utterly independent of such pedantic trivialities, there will be no true understanding of the Bible, and no peace from such stupid assaults of its enemies.

Let us refuse to be in bondage to such notions as these. Let us know the truth and the truth shall make us free. Thus shall we gain in the stability of our belief, and, it may be, many besides ourselves will gain by it too. For may we not hope, if we lay aside our unwarranted theories, that much of the misconceptions and hostility to the Bible will gradually clear away? Our secularists and infidels do not all want to be such. We by our foolish notions

have driven many of them to unbelief. Let them see that Christian men need not be unreasoning bigots; that the Church, which condemns the tricks of trade, will equally condemn playing tricks with evidence. Let them see that truth alone is the object of our quest, and that we are fearless and unprejudiced in the pursuit of that truth, and we shall have done much towards winning back to religion those who are honest and sincere in their unbelief.

IX

A Caution

Let me close with a few words of caution. In dwelling so fully on the possibility of scientific and historical inaccuracies in Scripture, there is a danger of very much exaggerating the importance of the subject. The reader must clearly keep in mind—(1.) That there are but few, and chiefly insignificant cases, where there is any question of accuracy raised. (2.) That even of these, some are certainly due to errors of copyists, and did not appear at all in the original writings. (3.) That allowance must always be made for our ignorance of the unrecorded circumstances necessary to complete the story, and for the fact that when different true accounts of the same incident, written with

extreme brevity, are put together, a reader may easily imagine errors and contradictions where none exist. It would be easy to give instructive examples of this from secular history.

Therefore, while we dare not insist on the absolute infallibility of history or science in the Bible, we should recognise that the question is of little importance. And let me add, too, that the dwelling on such matters as the little flaws in the earthen vessel which holds God's treasure is of little profit, except for such as are disquieted about them. In the wide extent of God's rich pastures there is surely small need of feeding on "difficulties and discrepancies." If we study not our Bibles for spiritual food, such studies as this will but wither and enfeeble us. As old Fuller quaintly and wisely puts it—"If men will not eat the plain meat of God's Word, they shall not wonder if they be choked with the bones thereof."

CHAPTER V

PROGRESSIVENESS OF GOD'S TEACHING

I

The Moral Difficulties of the Old Testament

In the previous chapter I referred to the two popular assumptions that stand out above all the rest as especially fruitful in causing doubt and disquiet. The first of them, which was there dealt with, is the chief cause of INTELLECTUAL difficulties about the Bible; the second is the chief cause of MORAL difficulties. With this second assumption we have now to deal.

ASSUMPTION II.—*It is essential to inspiration that God's teaching of moral and spiritual truths should not be a growth through lower and more imperfect stages, but should appear from the beginning in its full perfection.*

This is the more dangerous assumption of the two. To most people, after all, the intellectual are not the

really important difficulties in Scripture. Common sense soon helps them to see that it is not necessary for God to make an inspired writer infallible in literary and scientific matters in order that he may be able to teach men the beauty of holiness. The really formidable difficulties arise from the fact that some of the Old Testament utterances seem to fall below the level of the enlightened Christian conscience. How, it is asked, can such utterances have been inspired by the Holy Ghost?

For instance. We find in early days low and crude conceptions of God, as of a mere tribal Deity, who cared only for Israel, and was hostile, or at least indifferent, to all nations beside. We find slavery permitted in the Bible, and plurality of wives, and a man allowed to divorce his wife by merely writing her a paper of divorcement. We read with repulsion of that act of treachery which Deborah the prophetess greeted with a triumphal benediction higher than that bestowed upon the Virgin Mother herself—

> "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be."

In the midst of the most devotional psalms we are sometimes startled by a vigorous prayer for God's vengeance upon sinners, or worse still, upon men who have ill-treated the Psalmist himself. We can-

not think that Jesus Christ would have approved of such sentiments. We feel that even we ourselves cannot approve of them.

II

A Rational Method of Education

True, these difficulties are but as a few insignificant spots on the beauty of the moral teaching of the Bible. But yet they cannot be shirked if we are honestly trying to understand inspiration. I know that some people, whose reverence for Scripture is not sufficiently tempered with common sense, consider it wrong to question the morality of these matters. It seems to them "a presumptuous setting of one's own conscience to judge of the Bible." Coleridge in his "Confessions" tells of a good divine who, when questioned about the praiseworthiness of Jael's act, closed the controversy by observing that, "for his part, he wanted no better morality than that of the Bible, and no other proof of an action being praiseworthy than that the Bible had declared it worthy of praise."

Such men are a great source of danger to the Bible. I fear there are still many like him, and I therefore want here most positively to insist that in your reading of the Bible you must fearlessly reject

any meaning of a passage which clashes with the dictates of the universal[1] Christian conscience. God gave you your conscience as well as your Bible. Through conscience is the Divine Spirit's way of communicating with the human spirit, and therefore any interpretation of a passage which clashes with men's highest sense of what is right and true must ever be regarded with suspicion and distrust.

It is sad to think that such words as these should be needed at the beginning of the twentieth century, but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that they are needed, and that sore injury has been done to the cause of religion by the neglect of thus using the God-given conscience in the interpretation of the Word of God.

It has often been asserted that we must not venture to argue from man's notions of what is right and wrong; that even if we were told, what men have often been told, that a doctrine taught in Scripture means something that clashes with men's highest sense of what is generous and right and fair, yet our moral shrinking from it must not weigh one jot—true, child-like faith, we are told, will accept it without hesitation!

[1] Notice that I do not say "which clashes with my individual conscience or yours," since my conscience or yours may chance to be disordered or mistaken; but of the utterance of the collective conscience of educated Christian men one may safely say, "Vox populi, vox Dei."

True, child-like faith, believe me, will do nothing of the kind; and it is a most pernicious thing, subversive of all true religion, to speak thus of faith. True faith in God means faith in a *Person,* faith in a *Character,* faith in an Infinite Justice and Love and Holiness and Nobleness and Generosity; faith in a God who, if I may so speak, would lay down His Godhead itself before He would consent to do anything unfair or ungenerous or unkind to any man. This is the faith you must pray for in your Bible-reading. You must be like a loving, trustful child, always loyal to your Father and jealous for His character, and refusing to believe anything unworthy of Him, even though men should think they find it in His written Word.

If any of my readers is satisfied, like Coleridge's cleric, that conscience must not judge of the morality of the Bible, he need not trouble himself to read any further; if otherwise, let me try to help him if I can. My plan will be to take him away from these difficulties for the present, and bring him back to them again at the close of the chapter. Meantime let me try to put him in a better position to judge of them.

I want to point out that these difficulties arise from people starting with a false assumption. They say, "If God the Holy Ghost was the teacher in

the Old Testament, He must at all times have taught the very loftiest and noblest duties. Anything of crudeness or imperfection, or lower moral teaching, would be incredible at any period in teaching that came from God." Now I distinctly challenge that assumption. I say you have no right at all to make it. I want to show you from your own method of educating your children that what you expect in the Bible would be both unwise and unnatural, and that what you ought to expect is exactly what you find—a lower and more elementary teaching rising up slowly step by step till it is crowned at last by the teaching of Jesus Christ.

III

First Illustration

In all our educational work we recognise without any hesitation the law of gradual growth, gradual development. We know that we must begin at the lowest rudiments, that very crude and imperfect conceptions must satisfy us at first; in fact, that higher knowledge would be useless, if not misleading, until the mind has grown sufficiently to appreciate it.

The mathematical genius, with his keen intellectual delight in solving the most difficult problems of the universe, can look back to a stage when such

problems would have been utterly unintelligible to him, and therefore would have been very unfit objects of study to put before him. He never thinks of putting such studies before his boy, who is just beginning to master the rudiments of Euclid. He knows that a long and gradual training is needed before the child can clearly see even that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides, and a still longer training before he has grasped the truth that that mathematical fact must necessarily be true of every right-angled triangle in the whole universe of space. The father can hardly remember the time when such discoveries were new to himself. He looks back along the almost endless range of upward intellectual steps which still lie between his boy and him. But if he is wise, he does not try to hasten things too much. He does not say, "I know that this higher knowledge of mine is true and valuable, and full of intellectual delight to me; therefore I shall insist at once on teaching it to my son. Why should he be content with lower knowledge when the other is so much higher and grander and more beautiful?" No; he sees that the mind of his son is not fitted for it at its present stage, and so he wisely and patiently waits for his natural and gradual development.

IV

Second Illustration

And is not this equally true of our attempts at moral and religious training? Place a wise, judicious man at the head of a slave mission in Central Africa, over people gathered in from slavery and savagedom, and with all their evil habits strong upon them, a low degraded race to whom drunkenness and impurity and murder and revenge are amongst the ordinary incidents of life. Will he begin by insisting on a complete sweep of all their faults and foibles, and lay down strict rules of lofty conduct, the beauty of which they are utterly unable to appreciate, and the enforcement of which will probably drive them into open rebellion? Will his primary teachings be of the duty of self-sacrifice, of loving their enemies, of chivalrous devotion to women, of lofty faith and sweet adoring love and perfect consecration of the life to God? Will he demand at once from them the high standard of conduct that exists among the saintliest Christians at home?

Nay, surely, if he be a wise man he will at first tolerate much of which he really disapproves, he will overlook much that grieves and disappoints him, remembering the law of gradual development.

He will issue but easy simple commands. He will teach but easy elementary lessons. He will rejoice at every sign of effort after good, even though it still be largely mixed with evil. Lovingly, prayerfully, hopefully, he will watch over his people in his slow, patient system of education. He will care more for a very little growth of real character than for any amount of strict external conformity. He will be content to move slowly, to win his way by almost imperceptible degrees. He will give hearty approval to acts which, for these poor savages, really mean progress upward, though to the outer world they seem acts rather to be censured than praised. He will be content for a time with crude and imperfect notions of God and religion. He will "put himself in the place" of the poor faulty strugglers upward, and to try to understand and sympathise with them; he will try never to lose faith in their ultimate progress to a higher life.

As an earnest prayerful man he will be daily asking for his degraded people that God would "cleanse the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit." But he will believe, that the presence of God's Holy Spirit does not necessarily imply the absence of all error and wrongdoing; that it implies only the possession of some truth, some life—often very little truth

and life indeed. And thus believing he will patiently wait, teaching, praying, hoping still.

By-and-by, when some of these converts have grown into noble, high-minded Christian men, trying to follow more closely the path of The Crucified, will they not look back on the early training and the early notions as on a lower stage that they have long since passed, and yet will they not confess that this lower stage was a necessary part of their progress upward to a higher life?

V

Brahman Development—an Illustration

To use an illustration from the history of heathenism:—In Professor Max Müller's account of the Brahman religious teaching in India[1] we learn that the pupils pass through three stages of religious development—that of the student, the householder, the philosopher. The student is rigorously brought up in learning by heart the faith of the Vedas, the sacred books. In this faith as householder he believes and prays and sacrifices. But in the third stage, when his children are grown up and his hair is grey, he is emancipated from these

[1] See J. M. Wilson's "Letter to a Bristol Artisan"; a letter deeply interesting and fruitful in suggestion.

lower forms, and concentrates his thought on the Eternal Self alone. The Vedas have now become lower knowledge for him. The gods Agni and Indra become as mere names. "For thousands of years there have been Brahman families in which the son still learns by heart the ancient hymns, and the father performs day by day his sacred duties and sacrifices; while the grandfather looks on all ceremonies and sacrifices as vanity, sees even in the Vedic gods nothing but the names of what he knows to be beyond all names, and seeks rest in the highest knowledge only. The grandfather does not look with contempt on the less enlightened son or grandson; nor do they, though strictly bound by the minutest rules of the old ritual, speak unkindly of him. They know that he has passed through the narrower path, and so do not grudge him the freedom and wider horizon of the higher views he has attained to."

VI

The Education of the Race

Our next step is to see that what is true of the education of the individual is true of the education of the race. The individual man is capable of development from the cradle to the grave. Now, this

is equally true of the race as a whole. There is a capacity of continual development, each generation incorporating into itself the results of the preceding generation's development.

The power by which the present ever gathers into itself the results of the past makes the human race, as it were, a COLOSSAL MAN, whose life reaches on for thousands of years. The successive generations of men are days in this MAN'S life. The discoveries and inventions of the different epochs are HIS works. The creeds and doctrines and opinions and principles are HIS thoughts. The state of society at different times are HIS manners. HE grows in knowledge, in self-control in visible size, just as we do. And HIS education is, in the same way and for the same reason, precisely the same as ours.[1]

We may then rightly speak of a *childhood* and *youth* and *manhood* of the human race. The men of the earliest ages were but children as compared with us. They required a lower and more elementary teaching; less demand upon their self-control; more allowance to be made for their failures and their sins. They were in the lower classes of the great school of God.

[1] See Temple, *Education of the World*, Essays and Reviews, p. 3.

VII

The School of God

If I have at all succeeded in my object, the reader will now have reached the idea of God's *gradual, progressive* method of educating humanity, and he will be ready to take a truer view of the morality of the Bible.

The Bible, or rather the Old Testament, must no longer be regarded as a mere set of precepts and examples applicable to all cases and for all time. It must be regarded rather as the story of this gradual education in nobleness, in religion; the patient, Divine building up of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament tells how a special nation was trained; how the impulses of a poor degraded slave-race coming out of Egypt were checked and guided and chastened and elevated by a slow and gradual process; how God watched over them as the refiner of silver over the crucible, slowly and patiently "purging their dross and taking away their tin."

It tells of His plan of progressive education, like that of the ideal teacher in our illustration; how many things in the early days were overlooked or "winked at" (as the Authorised Version badly puts it);[1] how slavery was not at once swept away,

[1] Acts xvii. 30.

but its cruelties forbidden and its abuses checked, how divorcing of wives was not absolutely prohibited, but laid under stringent regulations, so that it could no more be a mere matter of careless whim; how the wild national customs of revenge were kept in check by the use of the cities of refuge, giving time for the moderating of the avenger's passion.

It shows how the kindly spirit of gentleness and forbearance and care for others' interests grew into their legislation by the inspiring of the Holy Spirit. It shows that their idea of God was often crude and imperfect, like that of our children when their teaching has but begun. It shows real piety and earnestness of moral purpose involved with imperfect and inadequate forms of faith and mistaken notions as to the will of God. It shows in each age the teaching coming just as it was needed, not too fast or too slow; adapting itself to the questions and conditions of the age, keeping always well ahead of the times to which it came, but not too far ahead for the people to follow. In a word, it shows to any careful reader the gradual development of religious thought, the continual progress from the early inadequate notions of God and right and duty, to the full moral beauty of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Should the reader have any doubt of this devel-

opment of God's teaching, he can learn it beyond all question in the words of Our Lord, *e.g.*, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time,[1] Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." "Moses, for the hardness of your hearts," permitted divorce on certain easy conditions, "but I say unto you, that he who putteth away his wife except for fornication committeth adultery;" and again, when the indignant disciples wanted to call down fire, "as Elijah did," upon those who had slighted their Master, they were sternly taught that the spirit of Elijah was not the Spirit of Christ; that they belonged to a higher stage of the spiritual education.

Let us remember that it is the Bible itself which has taught us to judge of the morality of its earlier teaching. This very fact, that we are able to judge the imperfection of the Old Dispensation by a more advanced standard, shows how effectually through all these ages of patient education the Spirit of Truth has pursued His work. The conclusive logic of facts shows that the Divine policy of Revelation has been successful. "Do not ask," says St. Chrysostom, "how these Old Testament precepts can be good now when the need for them is past; ask how

[1] See Revised Version, Matt. v. 21.

they were good when the period required them. Their highest praise is, that we now see them to be defective; for if they had not trained us well, so that we became susceptible of higher things, we should not have now seen their deficiency."

VIII

Back to the Moral Difficulties

I said that I would bring my reader back to the moral difficulties again as soon as I had put him in the right position to judge of them.

I have already insisted on the right of the human conscience to criticise the lives and words of the men of the Bible. But, after what has been said, the reader must see what allowances we have to make in our criticising them. We have reached a higher stage than that of Jael or Deborah, or Samuel or Elijah, in God's great ethical education of humanity. We are as men on the higher steps of that

> "Great world's altar-stairs
> That leads through darkness up to God."

Therefore, in criticising the words and acts of those on the lower stages, we must judge them by the stage at which they had arrived. The fact of the lower stage does not at all deny to them the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If I have got my reader to

grasp the idea of religion as a constant education of humanity, a gradual development onward, a growth of the human up towards the Divine by the indwelling of a mysterious Divine Spirit ever urging man towards God, he will see that a lower conception of God and Right and Duty three thousand years ago was quite compatible with Divine inspiration. He will understand that even Moses and Samuel and David may have had, on some points, lower spiritual conceptions than some of the children in our Sunday-schools to-day, and yet that their conceptions were so far above those of the people whom they taught that only a Divine inspiration could account for them.

It is not, of course, that God's laws of right and wrong have in any degree changed any more than the laws that govern the motions of the universe. It is only that, as in the one case so in the other, they have been but gradually and progressively revealed to men as they were able to bear them. "The faults of the Old Testament are, as Herder said, the faults of the pupil, not of the teacher. They are the necessary incidents of a course of moral education; they are the unavoidable limitations of a partial and progressive Revelation. If God chooses to enter on a historic course of Revelation, then that Revelation must be accommodated to the

necessities and limited by the capacities, mental and moral, of each successive age."[1]

If this law of gradual growth be kept steadily in mind, the moral difficulties of the Old Testament will in a great measure disappear. Let us go back to the instances already given at p. 157, and see how they look now from our new point of view.

(1.) We find in early days a less perfect conception of God. He is great and powerful, greater than all gods; He loves righteousness, He hates iniquity; but He is often regarded as only the God of the Israelite nation, not seeming to care at all for any people beside. Yet there are glimpses of higher truth, such as His care for Nineveh, His dealings with the Arabian Job, and especially His word that in the promised Seed "should all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gradually the horizon widened with the prophets. But it was not until after the coming of Christ that the old imperfection was finally done away, and Jehovah was revealed as the Father of all men, the God "who willeth all men to be saved."

(2.) We find in the Psalms the lofty moral teachings and burning aspirations after God and holiness now and then marred by the stern prayer for punishment on those who sin against God, some-

[1] Newman Smyth, *Old Faiths in New Light.*

times even on those by whom the Psalmist was oppressed. But the difficulty vanishes as we remember the law of growth. These prayers are not mere utterances of selfish spite, they are the claim which righteous Israel makes upon God that he would vindicate His justice. But it was in an age when this life was regarded as the scene in which God must finally vindicate Himself. It was in an age that did not clearly distinguish between the sin and the sinner—an age when moral indignation and stern, uncompromising hatred of villainy showed itself in invoking vengeance upon the villain as the enemy of the God who hates all villiany. We see that we are judging men in the lower stages of the gradual building up of the Kingdom of God. We see, too, that there is a human element in the Bible, that the ore, however rich, is not all pure gold.

(3.) We find such institutions as slavery and polygamy and divorce, not, mark you, by any means commended or even encouraged, but borne with and restricted, and gradually purified by the steadily increasing influence from on high.

(4.) We find actions approved of or mentioned without blame which we, in the purer light of Christianity, must regard as blameworthy. Take, for instance, the case already referred to, of the commendation of Jael by the Amazon prophetess of

Israel. Many ingenious explanations have been given, such as that Jael's act might have been in defence against a personal outrage of Sisera, or that Deborah might not have been really inspired, or that the narrative in the Scripture does not necessarily commend the act of Jael, &c. &c. I see no reason for such conjectures, and no necessity for them either, if the reader has followed what has been already said. Deborah spoke as a "prophetess," but as a prophetess enlightened with only a small portion of that Divine Light which was to go on brightening ever more and more "unto the perfect day."

"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof." So sang Deborah. Was it to gain some personal end, to gratify some personal spite? Nothing of the kind,

"She was a 'mother in Israel,' and with the fervour of a mother's heart and the vehemency of a patriot's love, she had shot the light of love from her eyes and poured the blessings of love from her lips on the people who had 'jeoparded their lives to the death' against the oppressors, and the bitterness awakened and borne aloft by the same love she precipitated in curses on the selfish and coward recreants who 'came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.' As long as I have the image of Deborah before my eyes, and while I throw myself back into the age, country, and circumstances of this Hebrew Boadicea, in the yet not tamed chaos of the spiritual creation; as long as I contemplate the impassioned, high-souled, heroic woman in

all the prominence and individuality of will and character, I feel as if I were among the first ferments of the great affections—the proplastic waves of the microcosmic chaos, swelling up against and yet towards the outspread wings of the Dove that lies brooding on the troubled waters. So long all is well, all replete with instruction and example. In the fierce and inordinate I am made to know and be grateful for the clearer and purer radiance which shines on a Christian's path, neither blunted by the preparatory veil nor crimsoned in its struggle through the all-enwrapping mist of the world's ignorance; whilst in the self-oblivion of these heroes of the Old Testament, their elevation above low individual interests; above all, in the entire and vehement devotion of their total being to the service of their Divine Master, I find a lesson of humility, a ground of humiliation, and a shaming, yet rousing, example of faith and fealty.''[1]

And if from Deborah we turn to Jael, we must use the same key to solve our difficulties: the lowness and imperfection of moral perceptions in those earlier days of the world's education.

Here was one of these imperfect acts of heroism, those deeds of mingled good and evil which have so often won high praise in troublous times. The daring, the self-sacrifice, the devotion that would risk everything to deliver Israel from the tyrant, these were of God even though mingled with treachery that a higher morality must sternly condemn. How easily we might even praise her ourselves perhaps, if we knew all the circumstances, and if the story were not in sacred but in secular history. ''We

[1] Coleridge's *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit.*

do not condemn the Greeks, according to the light which they had, for praising Harmodius and Aristogiton in their plot against the tyrant of Athens. We ourselves are almost inclined in consideration of the greatness of the necessity and the confusion of the time, to praise the murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday, 'the angel of assassination,' as she has been termed by an historian of unquestioned humanity. Why should we not be as indulgent to the characters of Jewish history as we are to those of Greek or French history?'' [1]

Dr. Arnold has well put this case of Jael:

''The spirit of the condemnation of Jael is, that God allows largely for ignorance where He finds sincerity; that they who serve Him honestly up to the measure of their knowledge are, according to the general course of His providence, encouraged and blessed; that they whose eyes and hearts are still fixed on duty, and not on self, are plainly that smoking flax which He will not quench, but cherish rather until it is blown into a flame. . . . When we read some of those sad but glorious martyrdoms where there were good men—alas, the while, for human nature!—both amongst the victims and the executioners, amidst all our unmixed admiration for the sufferers, may we not in some instances hope and believe that the persecutors were moved with a most earnest though an ignorant zeal, and that, like Jael, they sought to please God, though, like her, they essayed to do it by means which Christ's Spirit condemns? . . . Right and good it is that we should condemn the acts of many of those commended in the Old Testament, for we have seen what prophets and righteous men for many an age

[1] Stanley, *Jewish Church*, vol. i. Lect. xiv.

were not permitted to see; but no less right and needful it is that we should imitate their fearful zeal, without which we in our knowledge are without excuse; with which they, by means of unavoidable ignorance, were even in their evil deeds blessed.''[1]

IX

The Danger of Ignoring Progressive Teaching

This historical view of the Bible, as not a set of perfect precepts applicable to all time, but as the story of God's gradual education of humanity, is an absolute necessity for him who would understand its teaching. It has been sadly ignored in the past, and with most deplorable results to the cause of religion. ''It is grievous to recall how many a blood-stained page of history might have been redeemed from its agony and desolation if men had only remembered that the law of the Old Testament was as yet an imperfect law, and the morality of the Old Testament a not yet fully enlightened morality. When the sanguinary maintainers of shibboleths defended their outrages by the injunctions of the Pentateuch; when the treacherous and infamous assassinations of kings by a Jacques Clement or Ravaillac were justified by the examples of Ehud and Jael; when the Crusaders thought they did God service by wading bridle-deep in the

[1] Arnold's *Sermons*, vi. 86, quoted in *Jewish Church*, Lect. xiv.

blood of 'infidels' because they could refer to the exterminating wars of the Book of Judges; when the examples of Samuel and Elijah were quoted to sanction the hideous cruelties of the Inquisition; when the ruinous institutions of polygamy and slavery were supported by the records of the early patriarchs; when texts extravagantly strained were made the buttress of immoral despotism; when innocent poor women were burned as witches on the authority of a text in Leviticus; when atrocious crimes like the massacre of St. Bartholomew were hailed by Popes with acclamation and paralleled to the olden heroes' zeal for God"[1]—all these follies and iniquities could never have occurred if men had studied the Bible as they ought; if they had rightly understood the teaching of Christ, that the revelation of God was progressive, that the moral conceptions even of the inspired saints and heroes of the Old Testament when compared with the fuller light of the new dispensation were but

> "As moonlight unto sunlight,
> And as water unto wine."

And it is being sadly ignored in the present too, and with results scarcely less disastrous to the cause of truth. There is many a thoughtful Christian whose faith in God and in His Bible is being

[1] Farrar's Introduction to the *Pulpit Commentary*, p. vi.

slowly undermined by such Old Testament difficulties as Deborah's approval of Jael's treachery or the vengeful prayers that appear in the Psalms. There is many an uneasy question as to the Divine permission of slavery and polygamy; many a puzzled comparison between the God who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son and the tribal Deity of the Old Testament who only patronised a particular race. Men must be taught that the conception of God and the conception of morality were gradually formed. The earlier ideas were to the later but as the child's idea to that of the philosopher. The child's idea is fittest for the child, but too crude for the more fully developed mind of the philosopher.

Read the Bible with this historic view of its meaning and purpose, and it will reveal to you ever more and more the wisdom and patience of God in the education of the world. Read it without its historical perspective, as so many people do; look upon the biblical revelation as a plain surface, without depth and distance, and you cannot gain a much truer conception of the Divine wisdom in it than you could of the glory of God in the heavens if you should regard the sky as a flat surface in which the stars are fixed, forgetting the vast astronomical distances and the grouping of worlds and the harmony of all.

When, therefore, we hear the taunt of the infidel as to some moral difficulty of the Old Testament, "This is the Christian teaching about God, about conduct, &c.; it must be so, I find it in the Bible," we must be careful how we accept such a statement. Since the teaching in the Bible has been a progressive revelation, it is surely not fair to put us down in one of the cruder and more elementary stages, and say, "Behold your God. Behold your religion." We bring the Old Testament to Christ as we bring ourselves to Him; we test its teachings by His, and where it seems to us to fall below what He would command, we decline to accept it as an adequate statement of our religion.

X.

Objections and Answers

I have tried here to "put myself in the place" of my reader, and, by discussing the question with people of different minds, to anticipate the chief difficulties that might be felt about this chapter.

Objection I.—"It is dangerous and presumptuous to allow that conscience may judge as to the relative value of different parts of the Bible. Who are we to pick and choose amongst the words of inspiration?"

If what has been said already does not answer this objection, I shall but remind my objector that, whether it be presumptious or no, it is exactly what he and all sensible readers of the Bible are continually doing. He rises from the study of the Psalmists feeling that he ought to love and trust and praise his God as enthusiastically as they, but he never thinks that he should also pray for God's vengeance against sinners that rebel against Him. He reads the two precepts, "Little children, love one another," and "that they should keep themselves from things strangled and from blood." One of them he knows is of universal obligation, the other he would have no hesitation in ignoring.

Conscience must discriminate. The Bible cannot be studied to any profit without the help of the Spirit of God, and the organ through which He acts is the human conscience. This is one reason why it is so needful to connect Bible-reading with prayer for the aid of the Holy Ghost. He must lead us into all truth. His function was not ended with the inspiration of the writers. He has to be still the indwelling, energising power in His Church and in its individuals, "taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us."

Objection II.—"If some of the Old Testament is

to be regarded as imperfect and too elementary for the guidance of Christians to-day, may not men by and by say the same of the New Testament, and look back on its teaching also as but adapted to a lower stage of the spiritual education?"

Well, reader, there need be no "if" about some of the Old Testament teaching. Our Lord Himself tells us that it was not perfect as compared with the higher standard which He brought to earth. And as to the objection that men may by and by speak similarly of the New Testament, it will be time enough to think of that when the Christian world has approached within measureable distance of its lofty standard. We have now had it before us for nineteen centuries. Christianity in our day is probably nearer to the beautiful ideal there set before us than at any period since apostolic days, and yet in no nation, in no individual, has it ever even nearly attained to it. We can conceive nothing higher. We are still pressing forward towards it, but still it remains far away above us and beyond us.

In comparing the Old Testament with the New, it must always be remembered that between them lies the central fact of the world's history—the Incarnation of Christ. All that came before it was but preparing for it; all that came after was the interpretation and application of it.

The Old Testament was preparatory; the New Testament is final. The Old Testament teaching, noble and beautiful as it is, is not perfect. It is the growth of many centuries, the long, gradual lightening towards the perfect day, when, in the fulness of time, God should send forth His Son. Then came the New Testament teaching, not gradually and as a mere advance upon the Old, but suddenly, at a bound, in all its brightness, so far above the level of the world to which it came, that now, after nineteen centuries of aiming and pressing towards it, it is still as the sun in the heavens above us. "Let mental culture," says Goethe, "go on advancing, let the natural sciences go on gaining in depth and breadth, let the human mind expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it glistens and shines forth in the Gospel of Christ."

Objection III.—"Why then need we study the Old Testament at all if its teachings be elementary and imperfect? May we not safely neglect it for the higher teaching of the New?"

Any such objection would indicate a very false notion of the value of the Old Testament and of its relation to the New—a notion very different from that of our Lord and His apostles, as evidenced by

their use of the Old Testament Scriptures. True the Old Testament is to be regarded as preparatory to the New. But not preparatory as a *scaffolding* that may be removed, but rather as a *foundation* that shall endure for ever.

The New Testament teaching is not a setting aside, but a development of the more rudimentary teaching of the Old. For example, the Old Testament laws against the outward acts of murder and adultery are but developed in the New into their higher stages: a man must not hate his brother, a man must not indulge impurity of thought. The New Testament history is not a new history, but a continuation of the Old, the story of the full accomplishment of that which the whole Old Testament was preparing for and looking for.

The New Testament, therefore, cannot be fully understood except in connection with the Old. Its record of the fulfilment of prophecies needs for its study the knowledge of these prophecies. Its lofty stage of spiritual teaching needs the thought of the long gradual preparation for such teaching, while the whole continued view of man's progressive education reveals to us the working of the one Divine purpose, and declares to us the wisdom and the patience of God.

The Old Testament and the New cannot be sepa-

rated. Both are united for ever in Christ. He stands, as it were, between them, and lays His hand upon them both. He recognises that the Old is imperfect and preparatory. But He will not allow it to be depreciated nor laid aside. "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." He takes the old rudimentary teaching and gives it back to us, deepened, spiritualised, transfigured. He takes the old prophecies and tells us "they are they which testify of Me." He shows that the whole Old Testament leads up to Him, and then puts it back in our hands as a completed whole. "He bids us study it as 'fulfilled in Him.' The old lesson-book is not to be thrown away or kept merely as an archæological curiosity. It is to be re-studied in the light of the fuller revelation of Christ's life and teaching and work."

Yes, the Bible is one, and all its parts are essential to the perfection of the whole. It has been compared to a great church which it needed some fifteen centuries to build. "Of that temple the Old Testament is the nave, with its side aisles of psalm and prophecy, and the Gospels are the choir—the last Gospel perhaps the very Sanctuary—while around and behind are the Apostolic Epistles and the Apocalypse, each a gem of beauty, each supply-

ing an indispensable feature to the majestic whole."[1]

XI

Conclusion

It was necessary in this chapter to emphasise the progressiveness of God's teaching and the fact that the Old Testament is inferior to the New. And yet when I think of the magnificent soul-stirring words even of the early Old Testament, I feel almost ashamed of such a chapter of apologies. To explain half a score of instances of inferior morality in the Old Testament, I seem to have written as if there were no such glory and beauty and grandeur as makes the Old Testament, as the product of such an age, the greatest miracle of history.

When I turn to read in it the story of God's gradual schooling, what a marvellous story it is! what a proof it affords of its own inspiration!

When I look at the unwillingness of this people to be trained, it seems to me all the more wonderful still.

When I turn to the secular history of the world at the time when the Psalms were written, even at the lowest date that criticism may assume; when I

[1] Canon Liddon, quoted in Kirkpatrick's *Divine Library of the Old Testament*, to which book I desire to acknowledge my obligations for some thoughts in the above section.

read of its filthiness and depravity, of its worship of images and fetishes, of its degraded conception of God and duty; and when I place that history beside my Bible open at the Book of Psalms, it seems to me that the veriest infidels should be overwhelmed by the contrast. Listen to the words of passionate contrition, the prayers for forgiveness, the longings after God and purity and holiness of life, the bounding joy in the goodness of Jehovah, the knowledge of Him as "the Holy One of Israel," the Father pitying His children, the God "full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering and of great goodness, who knoweth whereof we are made, who remembereth that we are but dust."

How can men escape the stirring influence of such words and the miracle of their production at that age of the world! How can men in the very presence of God's glory act the cool and captious critic of Coleridge, "who," he says,[1] "the moment after I had been pouring forth all the love and gladness of my soul while book after book was passing across my memory, law and truth and example, oracle and lovely hymn and song of ten thousand thousands, and accepted prayers of saints and prophets sent back as it were from heaven, like doves to be let

[1] The passage occurs in the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, but I have taken the liberty of slightly altering it to suit my purpose.

loose again with a new freight of spiritual joys and griefs and necessities, should coldly ask me in the first pause of my voice whether I had forgotten the difficulty about Deborah's blessing or the imprecatory verses that occur in the Psalms!"

CHAPTER VI

INSPIRATION AND THE "HIGHER CRITICISM"

I

The Higher Criticism

The "Higher Criticism," as it is called, means the scientific investigation into the authorship, dates, sources, and composition of the books of the Bible, and into the special circumstances, if any, which called them forth. It is a comparatively new branch of Biblical study. It is called the Higher or Newer Criticism to distinguish it from the lower and older textual criticism, which occupies itself with the accuracy of the "text" and the means by which errors in it may be discovered and corrected.

The reader may remember a rather foolish discussion a few years ago as to the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, in which it was sought to be shown that not Shakespeare but Bacon was really the author. This may serve as an illustration of "higher criticism run wild." But there is a legi-

timate and valuable higher criticism applied to Shakespeare, which to Shakespearian scholars is full of interest. Certain plays, such as *Titus Andronicus,* bound up with his works, are, for one reason or another, suspected not to be from the pen of Shakespeare at all. Their style and language and ideas are critically examined, and their difference from his acknowledged works is pointed out. Then in other cases most interesting discussions are carried on as to the original sources from which he drew certain of his plots and characters. References to contemporary writers, too, explain many an obscure saying and many a local reference, and thus give new meaning and vividness to the author's work. No doubt there are often very foolish guesses and considerable amusement over certain "mares' nests" discovered by enthusiastic students. But, on the whole, it is a valuable instrument of knowledge, and had added considerably to the interest and enjoyment of Shakespeare.

Now, something like this is what in the theological world Higher Criticism proposes to do for the Bible. Its students, if questioned about the aim and object of their work, would say that there are certain books of the Bible which bear on the face of them marks of having been compiled from, or at least founded on, earlier lost documents; that others

which have no such mark, yet, in their opinion, show traces of having at least passed through the hands of literary "editors" or "redactors," who have either collected them in certain groups or completed their unfinished narratives, or in some other way modified the original work. They say, also, that the careful study of some books gives reason to doubt that they were written by the author whose name they bear.

Their reason for so examining Scripture is, they would tell you, reverence for the books of God, and the desire to throw all the light they can upon them. They consider that the books gain largely by being placed in their right "historical setting," and by the knowledge of the time and the circumstances and the reasons which, humanly speaking, called them forth.

But, the reader will ask, how can they possibly learn anything about the matter now, especially in the Old Testament, on which their chief attention is directed, when so many centuries have passed by and ancient history is silent on the subject? They learn, they would reply, much in the same way as our Shakespearian or other literary critics do. By a close study of the language in its different periods they can distinguish a late writer from an earlier, as we would distinguish an English writer of the nineteenth century from one of the fourteenth. By

accurate study of a writer's style and phrases and mannerisms, they can notice if the hand of a different writer occurs in the book, as our literary scholars would if they found the works of Burns with some of Tennyson's poems bound up amongst them. Then, again, an author often helps them by his local colouring, or by his mention of things or customs which belonged to a particular age or country, or by any passing references to contemporary history. All these things assist them in forming their judgment about a psalm or history or other literary production in the Bible.

II

Illustrations of the Higher Criticism

Perhaps I had better illustrate by a simple specimen. The reader has probably heard of this science chiefly in connection with the discussion about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, one of the most widely known of critical questions. It will serve, as an example as well as any other. Of course, I have no intention of taking any side in it here, or entering into it any further than is necessary to illustrate what is meant by the Higher Criticism.

The Pentateuch, which is held by the Jews as superior to and more sacred than any other part of the Old Testament, was always considered by them

too sacred to be the subject of critical inquiries. No one thought of raising questions as to its authorship or composition, or when it was written. It was commonly believed that Moses wrote it in the very form in which it appears to-day. However, it struck some people as strange that it should have mentioned Moses' death, and that he was "very meek," and say that "no man knoweth his sepulchre *unto this day*," and "there arose not a prophet *since* in Israel like unto Moses." Also, that the writer should seem to be continually looking back to the time "while the children of Israel were in the wilderness" or "the Canaanite was then in the land;" that the eastern countries should be described as "beyond Jordan," showing that the writer lived in Palestine, west of Jordan; that, to establish a question of geography, it should quote, as from some ancient authority, the "Book of the Wars of the Lord," which certainly could not have been earlier than the days of Moses; and other difficulties of a similar kind. So in the infancy of Biblical criticism the question was started, "On what authority does this belief rest, that Moses is the author of these books in their present finished form?" And it appeared that no answer could be given except that the Jewish Church seemed to have always believed it. Therefore critics thought themselves at liberty to

question the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, or at least to suggest that the writings of Moses might have been only the rough material, or part of the material, which was worked up by later authors or "editors" into "The Five Books."

It was clear enough that Moses had written a Lawbook, however large or small it might be;[1] that he had been directed to "write in the book" the account of the war with Amalek; that he recorded the journeyings of the children of Israel; that after he had written this Law he delivered it to the custody of the priests, directing that it should be read before all the people every seven years on the Feast of Tabernacles, and that it should be placed in the side of the ark that it might be preserved as a witness against the people. But, clearly, it does not necessarily follow from all this that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch in its present form.

This, then, is one of the questions about the Pentateuch on which the Higher Criticism has been spending much of its force. Was Moses the author of every line of the Pentateuch, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Deuteronomy? But there is another question which gives a better and more interesting illustration of the working of the new science. It is a question not of authorship but of

[1] See Joshua viii. 32.

composition. Granting Moses to have been the writer, were any or all of the books of the Pentateuch composed partly of documents existing before the time of Moses?

It was about the middle of the eighteenth century that this question first received any serious attention. A French physician named Astruc called attention to the fact that Genesis i. to ii. 3 is a connected account of the Creation, and, according to his opinion, at the very next verse another separate account of it begins, as if the writer had bodily incorporated two separate narratives. These narratives, he considered, were distinguished by certain differences of style, by difference in the order of events, and especially by the peculiarity which first called his attention to the matter, that in the one account the name for God is uniformly Elohim, and in the other uniformly Jehovah Elohim. This difference (*God* and *Lord God*) is quite evident in the English Bible. A fuller investigation seemed to many to confirm the notion thus started, that right through the Pentateuch there was a mingling of "Jehovistic" and "Elohistic" documents, together with certain genealogies and lists, all which had been copied into his work bodily by the author or editor. This idea has been run to an absurd extreme since by German critics, but it is in the main accepted by the most

prominent Biblical scholars. However, we have nothing to do here with its merits or demerits. We only give it as a very simple illustration of the questions of the "Higher Criticism."

III

An Unreasonable Panic

However we may object to the positions sometimes taken by its votaries, it is only fair to admit that a good many foolish and unjust things have been said against this Higher Criticism. It is not very flattering to men's faith in their Bible or their God, but it is true, all the same, that there was as great a panic over the Mosaic authorship of Genesis as if the foundation of the kingdom of God depended upon it. The work of the Higher Criticism is but to try to find out the truth about the books of the Bible, and men are only asked to believe what is fairly established. They are not bound to accept every extravagance and every unproved theory that foolish students of criticism may bring forward—only to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

It is, therefore, unfair and uncharitable to speak of it as "an attack on the Bible," "an assault on our faith," &c. The fact really is, that there are cer-

tain difficulties in the generally received literary beliefs about the Bible, such, for example, as I have just referred to in the case of the Pentateuch. It is not necessarily an attack on the Bible to suggest explanations of these, nor is it necessarily a praiseworthy position to refuse to think about them at all.

It is a striking illustration of the power of traditional beliefs that earnest holy men—men, too, of high intellectual attainments—should have branded this new study as "destructive criticism," "dangerous," and "subversive of all belief in the Scriptures." No doubt such epithets would apply to the reckless speculations of some of its students, but that is a different matter altogether. We are concerned, not with the reckless speculations, but with *the residuum of proved or probable truth* that its investigation may bring to us.

It is the old story of unreasoning panic whenever a traditional belief must be disturbed, no matter how slender the foundation on which it rests. We have seen it already in the questions about Verbal Inspiration and Infallibility, and Progressive Revelation, and the Human Elements in Scripture. To overthrow the traditional beliefs was to overthrow inspiration itself. By degrees men began to see that God had nowhere guaranteed the truth of these traditional beliefs, and that inspiration was not at

all affected by such matters. But it seems that that lesson needs to be learned afresh on every new occasion. People think now that it is subversive of belief to question the received date and authorship of certain Old Testament books. True, it is subversive of beliefs, but for the most part only of the traditional belief that the titles of the books are inspired of God, and that the books are to be received on the authority of certain writers' names. Who told us that Moses wrote Genesis, or that Joshua and Samuel wrote the books called by their names? Does the Bible tell us they wrote them? Does it matter very much whether they did or not, except, perhaps, as a help towards settling the date?

Even if they did write them, it is at least worth notice that they kept that fact to themselves. They did not tell us; they did not claim our credence for the books on the ground that they had written them. Indeed, they intimated plainly by their silence that the authorship was a matter of little consequence to us. Ought we not to take that lesson to heart?

This does not mean that we must give up the traditional beliefs as to the authorship of certain books. Not at all. There is far more to be said as yet for some of these traditional beliefs than for the arguments of the critics who attempt to overthrow them. But that is not the question. The question

is, Are we to get into a panic at the disturbance of such beliefs? Is our knowledge of the author's name, in the Old Testament at least, a matter of such serious moment to us? Quite possibly, when the dust of controversy has settled down, we may find our beliefs about them but little disturbed. But why should such vital importance be attached to them? Look, for example, at the "Book of the Minor Prophets." In the Jewish canon it is one single book in which these short prophetic utterances are gathered together. We know nothing about these men. The scribe or council who gathered them together seems to have known little more than their fathers' names or the reigns in which they lived. Surely their names give no authority to the writing—rather the other way.[1] Suppose that the book had been merely entitled "A Collection of Prophets," what difference would it have made to us? Should we have been told that it was dangerous to our faith not to know their names?

We are told that it would be dangerous to our faith not to believe that Moses himself wrote the

[1] Is any one, for instance, foolish enough to think that in the Homeric controversy the value of the poems would be altered if they were proved not to have been written by Homer? The poems are his only claim to greatness. We know nothing about him apart from them. The reader will perhaps remember Lewis Carroll's satirical conclusion, "that the Iliad was not really written by Homer, but by another man of the same name!"

whole Pentateuch as it stands to-day. Why would it be dangerous not to believe that Moses wrote it if we had reason to think that whoever wrote it had access to the necessary information? Is it dangerous to our faith to believe that the greater number of the Psalms of David were never written by the "sweet singer of Israel," and that we cannot be at all sure which of them are his? Is it dangerous to our faith to know that the "Proverbs of Solomon" include those of Agur the son of Jakeh, and also those taught by King Lemuel's mother, whoever she may be? Why can we not learn the lesson that is so patent in the Bible itself, that the authority of the books does not depend on our knowing the names of their writers, but on the fact that they are inspired of God, and that His Church was providentially guided in preserving those most profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness?

IV

Dangers of the Higher Criticism

The reader may with some reason justify his distrust of the Higher Criticism by pointing to the rash speculations of some of its most advanced students within the past few years. I do not want

in the smallest degree to minimise this objection. "From these critics we are aware," says an irate writer, "that Bibliolatry is possible; but so also, we think, are flippancy and self-sufficiency." And his rebuke is justified. Amongst the men who sneer most contemptuously at the foolish *à priori* assumptions about verbal inspiration and infallible accuracy, there are many who come to the study of the Bible phenomena with just as strong *à priori* assumptions of their own. There are those who start with the theory that because supernatural interference is easily believed in the uneducated infancy of nations, therefore the supernatural in the early histories in the Bible must be set down to myth and lenged, and be explained away somehow on natural grounds. There are hasty, impetuous men whose tendency is to jump to rapid conclusions, and, without waiting for the slow testing of time, to announce these as "established results of criticism." There are those whose confidence in their individual critical instinct leads them to decide most important questions of date and authorship and structure of books merely by their own judgment of probability and style and character of an author's mind.[1] It seems to the critic that cer-

[1] Fancy such a critic, a few centuries hence, examining the works of (let us say) Tennyson. How scornfully he would reject the opinion that the *Northern Farmer* was written by the author of *In Memoriam!*

tain passages are not quite in the author's style of thought or expression, and therefore, without waiting for the judgment of other men quite as capable as himself, he calmly brackets these as "probable additions" or "interpolations by a later hand."

This sort of work is responsible for making the very name of Higher Criticism stink in men's nostrils. It is responsible for reckless theories that to most men must seem irreconcilable not only with the inspiration but even with the ordinary trustworthiness of the Old Tesament. But this sort of work is not really scientific criticism at all, and scientific criticism should not bear the blame of it, however it may commend itself to some for its "boldness and freedom." Boldness and freedom are admirable in their place, but they may be very dangerous merits in dealing with the Bible if not held in check by caution and modesty and deep reverence for the Word of God. It is very easy in rooting up some tares to root up with them a good deal of wheat; and men need to be very careful in dealing with so complex and delicate a feeling as that veneration which has been growing for centuries around the Bible.

V

The True Position of "Criticism"

Our fear of over-boldness must not, however, land us in the opposite extreme. Our dislike of dangerous and baseless theories must not lead us to anathematise the Higher Criticism or judge uncharitably its thoughtful students. Rashness and hasty theorising and crude guesses are dangers in every young speculative science, and, like all other dangers peculiar to youth, will probably lessen considerably as it grows older. We must remember that all the students of criticism are not rash and hasty. We must remember that its object is to find out for us the truth, and only the truth, about our Bible. Surely in so far as it succeeds in this it deserves all encouragement, even if it overthrow many of the old strongholds of traditionalism which have become very dear to us. Truth can never overthrow anything but what deserves to be overthrown; and, in any case, God's will for us is to follow truth, wherever it lead and with whatever results.

But this does not by any means imply that we are to accept as truth the decisions of specialists in Biblical criticism merely because they are their decisions. Let us bow with all deference to their learning and skill. Let us give them full credit for

wishing to be candid and fair. But let us remember too that the decision of such difficult questions demands more than an accurate knowledge of Hebrew literature and history. It demands the recognition of *all* the evidence of every kind, not merely of the special evidence with which experts are most conversant. It demands the possession of a well-balanced mind and a broad judicial spirit. It demands also, what is too little insisted on, a reverent, religious disposition (which need not at all mean a *credulous* disposition), a capacity for entering into the *spirit* of the Book, without which no real criticism of any book can be done. It is therefore quite possible that a man should be deeply versed in Hebrew and philology and history, and well accustomed to the investigations of criticism, and yet that he should be by no means competent to pronounce judicially on questions relating to the age and origin and composition of the Old Testament books.

With all respect for the knowledge and ability of the specialists, they should be reminded that *their true position is in the witness-box, and not on the judicial bench.* In our law courts it is often necessary to call in on both sides the aid of specialists in medicine, or engineering, or farming, or such like and we know how conflicting their evidence fre-

quently is. Their evidence may form the most important part of the material for a decision. But yet the decision is not intrusted to them. It is recognised that while the expert is best fitted to produce the evidence, he may not be best fitted to use it for forming a decision. Common-sense and freedom from bias, and a judicial spirit and experience of men's motives and actions, and many other elements, come into the decision, which is consequently left to the jury or the judge.

Now, it is most important that this should be kept in mind. Whatever it may show as to their candour and fairness, it does not speak well for men's steadiness and common-sense that they should so frequently accept extreme conclusions on little more than the *ipse dixit* of specialists. The very fact of their being specialists, it must be remembered, tends to a certain narrowness and partisanship, and over-belief in the powers of their critical faculty. It tends to exaggerating the importance of their own special evidence, and not giving sufficient weight to the many other considerations, such as the reality of the supernatural, the appeal to the spiritual nature, the uniqueness of Jewish history, the testimony of Christ and His apostles, and the tradition of the Jewish and Christian Churches for three thousand years.

Let this fact be kept well before us, and we need have no fear for the result. Already there are signs of a more reasonable attitude on both sides, more modesty in the critics in formulating their judgments, more fairness in the public in listening to them. The most important recent contribution to the subject is Professor Driver's "Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament," and in it he tries most carefully to give the grounds of his decisions, and to distinguish between what seems conclusive and what only probable proofs. This is the true way to conduct such inquiries. We may accept all the facts on which his judgments are founded. Many of these judgments we may entirely reject. The critic's superiority consists in his knowledge of the facts. In judging of their force, he can claim but little superiority over any intelligent scholar who is able to understand them.

But, with these restrictions, let us welcome gladly all that the critics can teach us. When criticism is reverent, when it does not assume that the supernatural is unhistorical, when it does not ignore the possibility that God can reveal Himself to man, and when it proceeds on the fair principles of historical investigation, it does not appear why Christian men should object to it. It is a pitiful spirit that would try to muzzle criticism of the Bible by an

outcry about the dangerous results that may follow. It is a sorry figure that Christians have cut over and over again in the past, opposing every new knowledge in the supposed interests of religious truth, and then in nine cases out of ten trying to cover their retreat as best they could. Let us not be content to cut that figure to-day. He who has real faith in God will never be afraid of truth. Remember that God is able to take care of His truth, and which of us will venture to say that this Criticism may not be part of the method of doing so. "If this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."

VI

Are its Results to be Feared?

This is an important question. "Advanced thinkers" sometimes seem to argue as if almost any admission might be made about the Bible without in the least affecting its credit or its inspiration. This is by no means so. There are clearly marked limits beyond which we cannot go. There are admissions which, if forced on us by evidence, would destroy the general credit of the Bible, and therefore its claim to inspiration in any sense. Is any such danger to be apprehended?

I think it is important first to remind ourselves of the probability that the ultimate results of these investigations in the Old Testament will be very much less important than we, in the midst of them, are now inclined to expect. We can look back on the similar investigations in the New Testament which caused very widespread disquiet some years ago. We have the works of Colenso, and "Essays and Reviews," and "Supernatural Religion" to remind us of the other "disquiets" through which our age has passed already. And now that the din of those controversies has ceased, we can see that all their loud positive statements and counter-statements have left behind them but a comparatively little residuum of established fact, and a comparatively slight modification, and that for the better, of the views of men about God and the Bible. Doubtless the present investigations in the Old Testament will have more important results than those, but experience certainly justifies us in expecting that many of the positions confidently put forward to-day will be abandoned and forgotten before the next generation.

But, it will be said, granting this, yet is there not reason to fear that this "residuum of established fact" in the case of the Higher Criticism will be such as to shake your confidence in the Bible?

I do not think so at all. The chief reason for the fear at present lies in the fact that the most startling statements are naturally the most talked about, and therefore most likely to assume exaggerated importance. There is no denying that amongst the many new theories put forward about the Bible, especially by German critics, there are some which, if they should be established, would be a source of very grave disturbance, some indeed which seem irreconcilable with any belief whatever in inspiration. But it need not disquiet anybody that in the noise and bustle of controversy such statements should be made, and even supported by fairly plausible arguments. A little study of past controversies will easily show that no new thing has happened to us. Theories quite as startling have often been put forward before, even so recently as in the Higher Criticism discussions of the New Testament not many years ago. If we are to lose our heads over such things, we shall never be safe from disquiet, for, like the poor, they will be "always with us."

Let us remember that the old Book has spent a great part of its life in the midst of such "dangers," as we call them, and somehow seems no whit the worse for it to-day. Let us notice the probability already of the same result in the present instance. For the increasing agreement of scholars on certain

points is the only indication we can have of this future "residuum of fact," and without fear of contradiction we can say that no such indication exists in the case of these subversive German theories. Let us remind ourselves too of the many powerful reasons for believing in inspiration,[1] and how unlikely therefore is the truth of any theories inconsistent with it.

And especially let us rest with quiet hearts on the judgment of our Lord about the Old Testament. He did not believe all the popular beliefs of His day about it, the traditions which were held sacred almost as the Bible itself. Nor did He believe all the popular beliefs of our day about it either. But whatever popular beliefs He rejected, there was one to which He gave the fullest sanction of His authority. No Jew of the first century believed more firmly than Jesus of Nazareth that all the Old Testament of the Jewish Church was to be received as an inspired teaching from God. In those days of doubt and disquiet, when the credit of the Old Testament is so fiercely assailed, it shall be for our peace if we keep in remembrance that our Master accepted it as the Scriptures of God, and continually referred to it as of Divine authority. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away."

[1] Some of these have been given in Book I. Chap. II.

But while confident that nothing really inconsistent with its inspiration is likely to be established, let us be careful in laying down what *is* really inconsistent with it. Much of the disquiet about the Higher Criticism is caused by the denunciations of good men who think that holding by "the old paths" means holding by the old mistakes as well, and there are indications in the growing agreement of scholars that some things which these would consider dangerous to the Bible may possibly be found in the ultimate "residuum of fact."

In pointing out these let me make clear my object. I am not at all advocating the acceptance of these positions, nor even suggesting that many of them will be established. I only want the reader to face the question for himself without unreasonable panic or unreasonable concessions. Suppose these positions should be established by criticism, should we have reason to fear for the credit of the Bible?

Suppose criticism should prove to us that the Pentateuch is an editing of old Mosaic records, or that it is of composite authorship, not all the work of a single writer; or if it should establish satisfactorily that what we call Isaiah xl.–lxvi. is really the prophecy of a "Great Unknown," whose work was by ancient scribes appended to that of Isaiah,

as the proverbs of Agur and Lemuel are appended to those of Solomon—What if it should? How is the real value of the Bible affected?

Nay, even a more disturbing supposition. Suppose it should be satisfactorily proved that Moses left but a part of the Pentateuch legislation, and that this was afterwards, like other codes of law, by duly accredited men, expanded and adapted to the altered circumstances of the people in Canaan. Suppose, even, that the final touches were not given to it until the days of the exile. Could not God teach the nation gradually, and through many men, just as effectively as He could teach it all at once and by one man? And He has nowhere told us that He has chosen one of these ways rather than the other.

If criticism show good reason to believe that some of the traditional theories are incorrect as to the authors of certain books, even if it leave us in utter uncertainty as to who the authors really were, may it not be a good thing for us to learn that we had no business to believe in the inspiration of the titles of the books any more than in that of the marginal dates, and that the authorship of these books is in most cases a matter that is quite unimportant?

Or, again, if we are shown that some Old Testament book was not really written within a century

or two of the time we are accustomed to assign to it, what have we got to be alarmed about if the writer had access to the necessary information? When God touches our hearts and rouses our consciences by the record of words which He inspired of old, what difference does it make whether they were written a few generations earlier or later?

If we are shown that the early inspired historians, instead of taking down the history of Israel with infallible correctness from the lips of God, had to laboriously use older histories and annals and records and chronologies, like any modern historian, and with the risk, too, that inaccuracies of detail might creep in from these materials into their work; if it teach us that this sort of composition comes under the head of inspired, as well as that in which an enrapt prophet records his vision or the thoughts directly given to his soul by God, what is there about all this to alarm or disturb us? If we did not know before how the books were composed, ought we not to be thankful that somebody should teach us? If our previous notions about inspiration were wrong, is it not a very good thing for us to have them corrected?

Or if there be pointed out to us the dramatic setting of the Book of Job, the imaginative picture of Satan amid the sons of God holding converse

with Jehovah, the poetry in which Job and his friends discuss the mysteries of life; and if we are told that the study of Eastern poetry forces the belief that this is not all to be taken as literal fact, but as a poetical play founded on the patriarch's life, a dramatic setting for "The Mystery of Suffering," does it not give a beautiful reasonableness to the book? Could the Holy Ghost not teach them then by fiction and drama as our Saviour did later by the fiction of the Prodigal Son and the dramatic presentation of Dives and Lazarus?

VII

A Reasonable Attitude

This, then, is the attitude we must adopt towards the Higher Criticism. Every fact that it can reasonably establish—mark the word *establish*, not merely assert or conjecture—must be loyally, nay, gratefully received. For all truth is from God, and can never ultimately lead to anything but good. We must not "presumptuously stake the inspiration or the Divine authority of the Old Testament on any foregone conclusion as to the method and shape in which the records have come down to us." We must be willing to listen candidly to all the evidence brought before us. But we must not be in too great

a hurry in coming to a decision. We must be very slow in accepting new positions till we have heard what can be said in favour of the old. We must have our candour and boldness tempered by reverence for the book we are dealing with, by modesty and caution in judging of evidence, by honest desire not to disturb without cause the treasured convictions of others.

And we must be willing to give other men credit for being as honest as ourselves, and for caring as much for their God and their Bible. There must be no more of this uncharitable doubting of a man's personal piety and honesty of purpose merely because he argues that Moses did not write the whole of the Pentateuch or that the human element in Scripture is larger than we will admit.

And, finally, there must be more faith in God and truth, and in the free workings of the Holy Spirit; and also, there must be more prayerful study of the Bible. The more a man "enters into the secret" of the Bible, the more convinced he will be of its Divine light and power, and the more certain that any critical theory inconsistent with its inspiration must be false. It is a poor, pitiful thing, this constant fright and uneasiness of good people about the foundations of the kingdom of God whenever some new fact comes to light disturbing their old tra-

ditional beliefs. A change of our notions about the methods of God's working cannot alter the fact that the working is there; a revolution in our beliefs about the mode of inspiration cannot, surely, take away inspiration itself, any more than a correction in botanical systems could take away the beauty and perfume of the flowers.

Thus calmly and confidently, without rashness on the one hand or prejudice on the other, we must use this science of Higher Criticism as one of God's good gifts to our generation to win for us larger views of truth. And thus using it, we shall have more reason to rejoice in our gains than to be frightened about our losses.

There is a story of an ancient land where a fire once swept over the hills destroying the flowers and the foliage and changing the familiar aspect of the scene. But as the people were grieving for their loss, they suddenly discovered that the fire which had destroyed the flowers and the foliage had opened by its heat deep fissures in the rocks, disclosing to their view rich veins of silver.

"Which things are an allegory." For if by this searching fire of criticism we lose some cherished traditional notions, we shall gain in a deeper knowledge of truth. We shall gain in knowledge of the nature and limits of inspiration and in understand-

ing God's methods of communication with men. We shall be guarded from many errors and misapprehensions that are turning men away from the Bible to-day. We shall learn more of the conditions under which the Bible was written, the moral and intellectual attitude of the writers, and the special circumstances, if any, which caused them to write. We shall better appreciate the modes of thought and expression, and judge better the moral and social condition of the times. We shall be able to "put ourselves in the place" of the ancient writer and his readers, and enter more easily into the feelings of both. And thus new life and colour will pass into the picture, the history will gain enormously in freshness and reality and vivid human interest, and the truths expressed will have a meaning for us such as they never had before.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I

Now we have come to the close of these "thoughts for the present disquiet." They have been but poor imperfect thoughts. And as so often happens with one's most enthusiastic projects, the fulfilment has fallen far short of the design. But let that pass. Let us glance back for a moment at the results of our study.

We have examined the difficulties of our "disquieted thinker," and found that many of them resulted from prejudice and mistake, from his having accepted without investigation many of the popular assumptions about the Bible. We have seen that the right way to make a theory of Inspiration is not by deciding beforehand what God *must have* done, but by carefully examining the Bible to find out what He *has* done. In following this method we have been forced to modify some of our commonly held notions about the Bible. But I

have tried to show you that there is nothing new and need be nothing disturbing in this, since these "popular notions," which we have found untenable, are repudiated by all educated theologians, and have no warrant or authority from the Bible or the Church.

I trust that the insisting on this fact may be helpful not only to the disquieted Christians for whom I write, but also to some honest infidels who may meet with this book, and find that after all they have been infidels by mistake; that what they had been opposing and refuting as the Bible was only some unwarranted notion about it.

II

Possibly to some reader the thoughts here presented may be somewhat disturbing at first. There is always a certain disturbance in the readjustment of one's beliefs in a matter of such vital importance as this. We cannot in a moment accustom ourselves to a new point of view. But a little consideration will show that there is no reason for such feeling. The foundation of the Bible is no less firm than before; nay, rather, it should be far more firm than when every new suggestion of the higher criticism, and every new fact that seemed in

conflict with the infant sciences of ancient Israel, was sufficient to make men fear for the foundations of the kingdom of God. The authority of the Bible is no less. Its claims on our reverence and belief are no less. We have not found it to be less Divine. We have only to got to understand better the nature and method of the Divine operation upon it.

III

It is quite true that the view here presented will necessitate more trouble and more care in the study of the Bible. We can no longer take each verse as in itself a complete and definite proof-text on the matter it refers to. We must consider the context and the time in which the writer lived, and the circumstances under which he wrote. We must balance one part of Scripture with another. We must recognise that the Old Testament teaching is in parts lower than that of the New. We must build our beliefs less on isolated phrases or texts, and more on the general spirit of the Bible. And for all this there will be needed more thoughtfulness, more suspension of judgment, more modesty, more study, more prayer.

But the outlay of these will be repaid a hundredfold. The Bible, relieved from its incubus of

human traditions, will shine forth for us more real, more natural, more Divine. Our beliefs will rest on a firmer foundation. The old quakings about the moral and intellectual difficulties will be over. And though there may still be things that puzzle and perplex us, we shall learn that our Christian life does not depend on the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, but on the humble childlike obedience to the will of God, which for all practical purposes is clearly revealed.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of Thy Holy Word, may we embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

THE END.

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